

# THE BRITISH IN ASIA



# THE BRITISH IN ASIA

by

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Issued under the Auspices of the  
Institute of Pacific Relations, New York

by

FABER AND FABER LIMITED  
24 Russell Square  
London

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I.P.R. INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT—1 EAST 54TH STREET,  
NEW YORK

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*First published in mcmxlvii*  
*by Faber and Faber Limited*  
*24 Russell Square London W.C.1*  
*Revised edition mcmliiv*  
*Printed in Great Britain by*  
*Latimer Trend & Co Ltd Plymouth*



To F.

‘At a time when the established political forms of the greatest civilized peoples are tottering or changing;

when, with the spread of education and communications, the realization and impatience of suffering is visibly and rapidly-growing;

when social institutions are being shaken to their foundations by world movements, not to speak of all the accumulated crises which have not yet found their issues;

it would be a wonderful spectacle to follow with knowledge the spirit of man as it builds its new house, soaring above, yet closely bound up with all these things. Any man with an inkling of what that meant would completely forget fortune and misfortune, and would spend his life in the quest of that wisdom.’

*Reflections on History*

by JAKOB BURCKHARDT.

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## INTRODUCTION

[ i ]

British power for more than a century spread peace over South Asia. This region, the territory lying south of the Himalayas and between the Persian Gulf and Singapore, contains between one-fifth and one-quarter of the total population of the world. These are not backward peoples, but for the most part heirs of the most ancient civilizations. During the time when they lay within the British Empire they were, at least until its last days, left undisturbed by violence from outside, and their troubles did not cause commotion in the world beyond their borders.

It was not merely by British power that this peace was preserved. It was also by the Indian power which the British organized. The British Empire in Asia, though a part of the world-wide British Commonwealth, was always to some extent a separate entity from the rest of the Commonwealth. Indeed, it might have been called more accurately an Indo-British Empire. It was based on India; its extension over the countries clustered round the Indian Ocean was by joint effort, British and Indian.

The purpose of this book is two-fold. The first, since the time seems appropriate, is to try to set down what happened in South Asia during the period of British domination, and not only what has happened to its politics and social organization, but also to what lies behind these, the temper of its mind. Every conquest and rule of one country by another has in it a stain of evil. To write or read about it rouses passion both on the side of those who ruled and those who were subjected. A fair history is perhaps impossible by either an Englishman or an Asiatic. But the British period in the East has been

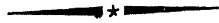
## INTRODUCTION

an important episode in world history; the changes which have occurred are matters of fact, requiring study.

The second purpose is to inquire what have been the consequences of the withdrawal of British power from Asia, and how the countries of the former British Empire in Asia have been prospering since that event took place.

A first edition of this book appeared in 1947. It has now been rewritten, and an account has been attempted of the events since that date.

## PART ONE



## BRITISH EMPIRE





## CHAPTER ONE



# THE INDO-BRITISH EMPIRE

[i]

The British Empire in Asia began its mature life in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth grew to be a system of territories, protectorates and alliances covering the southern part of the Asiatic continent. The circumstances in which the Empire came into being explain some of the peculiarities and indeed the paradoxes of its later history.

The home government in London never planned its Asiatic conquests. The parliamentary system would have prevented that. Public opinion would not have tolerated the upkeep of a large army, expensive and a threat to the personal liberties of the subject in the home country. Thus the Empire was not built by a national effort of the British people.

The Empire was in fact the result of a more or less private enterprise of a relatively small number of British expatriates. After the British Navy opened the Eastern seas in the eighteenth century (without which no Empire could have been thought of), the British Government gave its more audacious subjects an authority, or licence, or encouragement, to win in the East whatever by intrigue and the most economical use of a small white force they could seize and, by their own devices, hold. Occasional help in emergency was forthcoming from the British Government, as in the crisis of the Indian Mutiny in 1857; but beyond this the home government was unwilling to commit any large force to the support of its subjects in the East.

This charter, limited as it was, satisfied the adventurers because at the time certain extraordinary circumstances in the East gave them all the other opportunity they needed. The adventurers were at hand

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because, as Jeremy Bentham remarked at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the expanding British middle class had produced families which could find employment only in an expanding Empire.

By the achievements of the new conquistadores Britain enjoyed much of its wealth and standing throughout the century and a half which followed. A relatively small European people whose effective life was concentrated in a capital city and a few industrial towns found itself paramount over civilizations which had already been a wonder seventeen centuries before in the time of the Roman Empire, of which Britain itself formed a barbaric fraction. It enjoyed for a time a power of transforming masses of mankind such as had fallen to no other country. Nevertheless, the home public continued indifferent to this romantic construction. By British shoulders the Eastern skies were held suspended, but the British public was mostly unconscious of this, or at least would not have regarded the transfer of the burden as catastrophe.

Occasionally, it is true, its imagination was briefly fluttered by the news from the Orient. Spices, palm trees, incredibly cheap victories against armies 'thick as standing corn and gorgeous as a field of flowers', subject princes, a military Empire with pomp and panache run in more or less safety and at a distance which lent enchantment—these were the diversions of nineteenth-century England after the solid achievements of the Reform Bill and the repeal of the Corn Laws and the reform of the corporations. Yet it perhaps never believed that its Asiatic Empire was quite real. It was too much like theatre. If at times the public indulged its complacency in surveying it, its good sense recalled it afterwards to more sober views. The East was too glittering to be sound. Australia, Canada, were credible, went with hard work, and were to be taken seriously, but not the lands of glittering and wicked princes. Of those who knew that the Asiatic Empire was real and understood how it was composed, some shrank from it as something meretricious or morally tainted by the method of its acquisition. And indeed, what chance would Clive or Warren Hastings have had before the Nuremberg Tribunal?

From these peculiarities there were two consequences. The first was that the British never colonized their Asiatic Empire or even visited it in large numbers. British conquest meant thus only the substitution of a very small British administrative cadre for the former indigenous governors.

It followed that the British Empire in Asia was always at least in part a genuinely Asiatic Empire rather than a foreign structure. Its

## THE INDO-BRITISH EMPIRE

architects, receiving only sporadic and slender aid from Great Britain, had to create in the East itself the instruments to sustain and enlarge their rule. What impresses about them in the dangerous time when the structure was only half complete is how much at ease and at home they looked in that exotic world. They insinuated themselves in South Asia, raised Asiatic armies, financed them out of Asiatic revenues, and conquered as an Asiatic state. After an early attempt to exclude Indians from all political responsibility, they ran their Indian government, which was the centre of the whole system, by a bureaucracy the overwhelming majority of which was of indigenous origin.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the few hundred Englishmen who controlled the Empire could be regarded as the European mercenaries of an Asiatic power. They had got their hands upon an eastern machinery of government, and, while themselves remaining English and being often insensitively indifferent to oriental culture, operated an oriental system. Thackeray, speaking of British officers in India as 'Indians', recognized, perhaps unconsciously, what was their position.

The second result of the way in which the Empire was built was that Britain never incorporated its eastern territories in its political system as Tsarist Russia, for example, incorporated its conquered provinces British rule was a kind of net thrown over them, which could later be withdrawn; to detach its Eastern Empire from Britain would not have been to tear a vital part out of its body.

### [ ii ]

The history of the Empire must be described in more detail.

It falls into two sections; the first is the conquest of India by the British: the second the spread of their power from India as a base over South Asia.

How the British, or rather the corporation of merchants called the East India Company, conquered India in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been often described. The subjection of such a huge area by so strange and commercial a conqueror was spectacular, but there is no mystery about how it happened. It was not, as is sometimes suggested, that Britain was industrialized and India was not—for the conquest took place when industrialization was only beginning. It was that a country whose people were not yet united by nationalism faced an agency which as a corporation could pursue

<sup>1</sup> In the vast country the number of British administrative officers was usually no more than about three or four thousand, and in recent years much fewer.

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longer aims than individual princes, and which knew how to exploit the absence of nationalism, and so to act that India itself worked for the Company's benefit.

On the fall of the Moghul Empire the Company found its trade adversely affected and its safety endangered by the disorder which swept the country, and raised a force for its protection. This was chiefly Indian in personnel, though the officers were European. To the surprise of its masters, the army passed from victory to victory over the generals, magnates and Hindu princes who inherited the Moghul authority, and the Company found itself master of the largest organized territory in the country and could overawe the remainder. In all these exertions the Company had acted in fact as if it had been an Indian prince. It used Indian troops, it played Indian politics, it was thought of by Indian governments as one of the 'country powers', it made its way partly through Indian allies.

It has therefore been said that India was not really, in fact, conquered at all in the sense that an outside power invaded it, but one part of India, seeing no shame in co-operating with aliens, allied itself with a group of foreigners and thereby imposed itself on the other part, thus unifying the country. The historian, Sir John Seeley, remarked that a number of Parsee merchants in Bombay, tired of the anarchy which destroyed their trade, might have organized themselves as the British had done and have achieved the same result.

The French, who were also in India as traders, had had the same opportunities as the British, and played the same game, but used a system which proved less successful.

India was held by the British by the same means by which they had established their power. When a part of the Indian army mutinied in 1857, the mutiny was suppressed partly by British troops but also partly by India itself, and *The Times* correspondent of the time reflected as follows:

'I looked with ever-growing wonder on the vast tributary of the tide of war which was running around and before me. All these men, women and children, with high delight were pouring towards Lucknow to aid the Feringhee to overcome their brethren.'<sup>1</sup>

The result of the persistent activity of the East India Company was that, though few of its officers had had such audacious ambitions, it

<sup>1</sup> That this peculiar system was based on mutual convenience and not on any special cordiality between the races is shown however in another despatch by the same writer. 'In no instance is a friendly glance directed to the white man's carriage. Oh, that language of the eye. It is by it that I have learned that our race is not even feared at times by many, and that by all it is disliked.'

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ended by restoring a more or less unified Empire of India, and thus became the heir to the long line of Indian kings.

The four or five Englishmen who formed the Executive Council of the Governor-General, and a few hundred senior English civil servants—in sentiment, habits and dress so different from the nobles of the courts of Akbar and Aurengzeb—sat, in fact, on the Moghul throne and thereafter wielded the Moghul power. Time was to change the character of their administration and make them less adventurous and more bureaucratic, less free and more controlled by the India Office in London, less a young man's government and more hierarchical. But in one respect their government preserved its character throughout. Their Empire was not something integral to the British political life but was an interest or almost a hobby of a clique of the English middle class, who as civil servants or army officers found in Bengal and the North-West Frontier a greater satisfaction for talent and for a curiosity stirred perhaps by Herodotus and a classical education than they could in Whitehall and Aldershot.<sup>1</sup>

### [ iii ]

Having established their authority in India, having trained their armies, having organized a cadre of administrators, the new governors of India from the end of the eighteenth century turned their attention outwards. India is the core of South Asia. It stands out in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the great land mass in the southern part of the continent, and to the east, west and north lie minor countries in no sense its match whenever India is vigorous. Over them Indian power had at various times radiated in antiquity. Indian sailors, in voyages which at the time can scarcely have been less daring than those of Columbus, carried Indian arms almost as far as the Philippines; and the term 'India', as used by Marco Polo, meant not only Peninsular India but the regions of the Indian Ocean from Java to the coasts of Africa.

When the new British authority came into being, it found these border lands in confusion. The administration in India was the strongest power over much of the continent and was able, by moving its strength very slightly, to build an Empire with borders far beyond those of India itself.

<sup>1</sup> It has been pointed out that the details of the great decisions of British policy in India in 1946 and 1947 were decided by hardly more than a dozen men. The public as a whole was not interested—much less so than in the discussions before the Act of 1935.

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Its creation was a deliberate undertaking. The view sometimes put forward, especially for foreigners, that the British Asiatic Empire was an accident, that it was the lumber of Asia which crumbled from its own rottenness and fell into the arms of the British which happened at that time to be welcomingly extended, is hardly true. The initial British seizures in India itself may have happened in this way but not the further extension of power. The bureaucracy in India may not have been very Machiavellian—an impatient general said that it looked on vigorous action in an emergency as indiscreet; the home public in England may have been quite ignorant of what was done in its name, and the home government, except when goaded by individual experts, was chronically cautious; but a small band of ambitious men, successively in control of India's power, added stone by stone to the growing imperial structure. Though in the Indian Government a 'Little India' school always existed, there was also an 'Indian Empire' school; first one prevailed, then another: and in moments of the ascendancy of the latter the Empire spread.

Its spread was the result of Indo-British partnership. This fact can hardly be enough emphasized. It was a joint creation of Britain and India, of the emigrants from the British middle class and of Indian manpower and resources which they had organized. India could not have established the Empire without Great Britain, nor could Great Britain without India. All the principal actors who conceived the expansionist policies were Englishmen; but the Empire which they built was based on Indian, not British needs. <sup>VE</sup> Except for the sake of Indian security, what interest would Great Britain have had in the Persian Gulf, Tibet, or Sinkiang, in all of whose affairs it began to intervene? Indian emigrants, not British, swarmed into the new provinces; and while British capital built the railways, mines, plantations, and new industries, Indian moneylenders acquired the land. The fact that in their activities in Asia the British were in part doing India's business, and acting as servants of the Emperor of India rather than of the King of England, explains much about the history of the Empire which is otherwise obscure.

The details of the spread of the Empire need not be described here. Ceylon, whose maritime provinces had already been for three hundred years under foreign rule, first of the Portuguese and then of the Dutch, was annexed in two instalments at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Though Ceylon was thereafter governed from London through the Colonial Office, and not from India, the motive for its conquest had come from India.

## THE INDO-BRITISH EMPIRE

On the eastern side of India was the jungle peninsula of Malaya, divided among a dozen Sultans who were virtually pirate chiefs. At the end of the eighteenth century the East India Company obtained footholds in its ports, and gradually spread its authority over the interior, though with almost unaccountable slowness. The states of the Sultans became its protectorates. Until 1867 Malaya was the sphere of the Government of India, not directly of London, and though afterwards it passed, like Ceylon, under the Colonial Office, India's interest in it was not abated. Indeed it increased since nearly a million Indian immigrants came eventually to Malaya's rubber plantations.

With its immediate neighbour, Burma, the Indian Government fought three wars, the first in 1824, the second in 1852, the last, which ended in annexation, in 1886. A Burmese intrigue with the French in Indo-China, which supposedly endangered India's security, led the Indian Government somewhat reluctantly to the final step of conquest.

In the west, Aden, important as a coaling station, had been occupied in 1839. In the Far East, as furthest outpost, Hong Kong was annexed in 1841.

Such were the actual conquests made by the British from India as base. But besides annexing territory the Indian Government, with the British Government behind it, built for their defence an outwork of alliances and of spheres of influence. The Himalayan mountains, a frontier barrier such as no other country possesses, are the central feature in any Indian defence plan, but they have often in history given India a false sense of security. They have been described therefore as a natural Maginot line, and the British defence plan looked far beyond them; indeed it was said by one of the foreign secretaries of the Government of India in Victorian times that the true frontiers of the Empire delineated not the lands it administered but the lands it protected. The Empire is to be thought of as consisting of a kernel which was the rich lands directly administered, and of a protective rind; this rind was made up partly of minor and more or less primitive states, such as Bhutan and Nepal, and partly of belts of mountain or desert lands inhabited by people tribally organized; these were like the belt on the Scotch border in the Roman Empire where, as Gibbon remarked, "the native Caledonians preserved their wild independence, for which they were not less indebted to their poverty than to their valour". Over both these groups the Indian Government exercised a control whose form varied—Nepal was treated with the

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normal usages of diplomacy—but whose common purpose was to prevent or restrict their relations with other countries, or at least to ensure that they could not be used by them for hostile purposes.

Still farther afield, and as a sort of open ground in front of the outworks, the Indian Government formed a ring of neutral states. Persia, Arabia, Tibet, Afghanistan and even for a time a part of Sinkiang, fell thus into place in the system. On the one side the limit of India's interest was in general the Arabian desert between Baghdad and Damascus, which forms the true division between the countries which look towards Europe and those which look towards Asia, and which was once the boundary of the Roman Empire. But at one time the search for security extended even to Egypt, and if what was done there in the eighties was done by the home government, it was done at least partly because of the supposed needs of India.<sup>1</sup> On the other side the interest extended to Indonesia and Indo-China, though for various reasons it was usually less keen and alert than on the western side.

As a result of this buttressing of buffer states the Empire was placed in a position, very fortunate for avoiding friction in its foreign relations, that at no point did its actual political frontier march with that of any hostile great power. It was thus a system similar to that which Russia seems to be building at the present time.

By these seizures of territory, alliances, and the exercise of influence, the Indian Government turned South Asia into a political unit knit together for defence. There was a body of doctrine about how it should be held together. A corps of specialists in the Indian Army and the Foreign Office of the Indian Government, inconspicuously and at times with the sense of carrying on a conspiracy or an esoteric rite, secured the continuity of policy. Round it grew up a romance—the vision of the seas swept by the British Navy, the three thousand miles of the mountain frontiers of Northern India, the lands beyond, supposed in the imagination of the classically educated officials to be so much like the barbarian territory beyond the *limes* of the Roman Empire, the mysterious Central Asia in which forces might one day collect and coalesce for a descent on the tropic lands of the south, the small frontier forces whose wars with tribesmen (if heard of at all) seemed such amusing anachronisms to the outside world but which protected millions of peaceful peasants, the secret

<sup>1</sup> Forty years before the traveller Kinglake had written: 'The Englishman, straining for ever to hold his loved India, will plant a firm foot on the banks of the Nile and sit in the seats of the Faithful.'



## THE INDO-BRITISH EMPIRE

agents who, like the associates of Kipling's Kim, flitted through the mountain lands disguised as traders or lamas, loaded with silver rupees and measuring rods.

The system was described by Lord Curzon, one of those who most revelled in the tasks of its maintenance.

'India is like a fortress, with the vast moat of the sea on two of her faces, and with mountains for her walls on the remainder; but beyond these walls, which are sometimes of by no means insuperable height and admit of being easily penetrated, extends a glacis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our allies and friends, but if rivals and unfriendly influences creep up to it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene, because a danger would thereby grow up that one day might menace our security. That is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and as far eastwards as Siam. He would be a short-sighted commander who merely manned his ramparts in India and did not look beyond.'

The system lasted from early in the last century until to-day, its basic conception fairly constant though its details changed often. Those who operated it had in view for most of the time only one main threat to India's security. This was from Russia, whose rival imperialism from the beginning of the nineteenth century caused a stir and rumble throughout Central Asia. Indian policy tended to be an elaborate counter-mancœuvre, though periods of complacency alternated with periods of rueful panic. Thus there was a concentration on the land defences to the north, and a forgetfulness of possible danger from the east, an error for which the price was paid when Japan appeared as the enemy and in 1941 stormed defences which were ill-considered and inadequate.

### [ iv ]

What had been built was a continental order, a political structure in which South Asia, in a century of unexampled change, dwelt in unexampled security. The handful of British officers who, in the absence of an effective governing class in India, had seized power and had acted as the governing class of South Asia generally, had contrived (with maximum economy) a system which imposed tranquillity upon a fifth of the human race. They created an oasis in time, an age of unfamiliar bloodlessness, which may in future be looked back on

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by Asia as a disordered Europe looked back on the age of the Antonines.

What were the consequences for the peoples living within this 'system'? The Empire was like a high and brittle building which protected from the outside weather a host of people as varied as the races listed in the Biblical empires, whose ancient histories, modern usages, and picturesque life made this the most fascinating human assemblage of modern times. The architects who had built the structure and maintained its fabric introduced into it all the most up-to-date material installations—the railways, new roads, telegraphs and factories invented by the Industrial Revolution. But beyond this they did not wish to meddle with the lives of those whom it overarched. To try to do so would have been to despair; there were too many of them, their customs were too firmly set. Moreover, since a central peculiarity of the Empire was that it was run on a minimum capital of force, its administrators could afford to rouse no sleeping tigers, and were thus at most times conservative by principle. Discipline they insisted on; there was to be no fighting between inmates; some of what appeared to be their grosser indecencies were prohibited; occasionally in a busybody mood the authorities would issue exhortations in a brief and quickly exhausted ambition to modernize. But in general they were content with a reasonable quietness.

Yet in spite of their perhaps inevitable lethargy, changes in the life within the building took place rapidly. In this Empire there was no iron curtain. On the contrary, it was like a crystal palace (like which it appeared in some lights marvellous, in others shoddy), and through the glass walls the inhabitants could see what was going on in the outside world. In through the turnstiles passed a stream of visitors bringing the breath of change; and the inhabitants themselves were free to go outside. Glass walls also generated the hot-house atmosphere which so often goes before social revolution. And, however reluctant the administration might be to set afoot social change, it could not avoid a constant reformation and overhaul of the machinery of state to meet the changing day-to-day needs; and each time that it repaired or improvised, it brought in a western or modernizing influence. The new material apparatus of society also set in motion change on every side.

Thereby all the life of South Asia was set on end. For the technical apparatus of society and its laws are finally the thing which determines most of the details of the daily life of even the humblest human being. It is not true that, as Dr. Johnson said, laws and kings cause the smallest part of what human hearts endure. The new laws

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and kings of South Asia, together with the new engines, changed the way men made their living, the nature of their houses, their ambitions, their attitudes and supposed obligations towards one another.

With this change, with the progressive classes taking over the ambitions and the outward manners of Englishmen, there grew up the demand for self-government. Step by step during the present century Great Britain conceded this, making in the process the experiment of building in oriental countries political institutions which were a replica of Westminster; and with the process completed in India, the centre of the Empire, the constructive rôle of Great Britain in Asia is ended, or transformed, and the responsibility for the maintenance or dissolution of the unity of the region passes to its heirs, the national governments.

### [ v ]

One parallel to the British Asiatic Empire, both in its manner of conquest and in its effects, is so striking that it is strange that the British were never more conscious of it. Alexander the Great conquered Persia and the eastern world from a base which, compared with that, might have appeared as puny as island Britain compared with Asia. The instrument which he used was an army not merely of his countrymen, but drawn partly from the peoples whose governments he assailed. His Empire was not a Greek Empire; but an Asiatic one organized by a handful of Greeks and transformed by Greek ideas: so the British Asiatic Empire was an Asiatic one organized by a corps of British administrators and transformed by European ideas. In retrospect it seems that the rôle of the Alexandrian Empire was to be the means through which Greek ideas pervaded the Orient: politically it divided soon into succession states which fell one by one to other powers: its cultural rôle outlasted its political rôle: but even the effects of this were in the end exhausted. Point by point the British history in Asia either has followed or may follow the same course.

British officials in India enjoyed thinking of themselves as imitation Roman proconsuls. How much more entertaining a place British India might have been if, following perhaps the truer bent of the English mind, and seeing more rightly their true place in history, they had thought of themselves as descendants of the livelier, more humane and adroiter Greeks of the dynasties of Seleucus and Ptolemy.

*British action in Asia extended to the Far East, to China and Japan. But with the exception of Hong Kong, Far Eastern territory was not*

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*included in the Empire. This book deals with that part of Asia which fell properly within the Empire. In this region—South Asia—British power was spread over a large variety of peoples. But three or four main communities were outstanding. Each had had a long history; each had clear characteristics; each moulded in the most intricate detail the lives of those who belonged to it. They were the Indian society (which was itself divided into many subordinate communities), the Burmese society, the Malay society, and Ceylonese society. The history of the individual subject of the Empire is the history of what happened to these societies under its sway.*

*What then was the state of these different societies before the coming of the British? What has happened to them during the British period and as a result of British influence?*

## CHAPTER TWO



# TRADITIONAL INDIA: THE MIND

[ i ]

Many people who have lived in India for any length of time find they become its slave. If they leave it for ever, they return shortly. What seems inexplicable chance brings them back. Yet how are its qualities to be explained?

It is a poor land, harsh and for the most part ugly. Its arts, however splendid in the past, to-day are degenerate. Gawky palm trees, villages awry and crumbling, thin cows, children with swollen bellies, men and women with matchstick legs, sombreness, fatigue, dank heat, old matting and battered corrugated iron, the disappearance of the spring and freshness of life, the glint of tawdry ornaments amid squalor, everything insubstantial, disordered and crazy—these are the impressions of the traveller. The cities sprawl over huge areas, yet even so their inhabitants are congested; the wealthier houses are usually gimcrack, the poorer like cowsheds, the tanks full of slime.<sup>1</sup>

Thus India at first appears; but it has a latent power to shed its rags and by fits and starts to dazzle as the most impressive pageant of the world. (So in Indian cities at a festival the repellent slum of the daytime becomes at night transformed by thousands of lamps into a world of romance.) This quality of India has given it its hold on man's

<sup>1</sup> The first Moghul Emperor of India, who lived at the start of the sixteenth century, wrote as follows of the land which he had conquered. 'Hindustan is a country of few charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits, there is none; of manners, none; in handicraft and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, musk-melons or first-rate fruits, no ice or cold weather, no good bread or cooked food in the bazaars, no hot baths, no colleges, no candles, torches or candlesticks. . . . Pleasant things of Hindustan are that it is a large country and has much gold.'

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imagination, and the study of what India has done and what it is to be should perhaps begin with what the imaginative writers say of the Indian panorama and the flavour of the land. Out of the thousand pictures which might be chosen, here are two selected at random, the interest of which is that they are by writers divided by two thousand years from one another, and that they both deal with the sensuous attraction of the country. The first is from one of the most ancient poems of South India whose date is uncertain but which probably comes from very early in the Christian era:

‘Do you not feel here the south wind blowing from Madura? It is mingled with the divinely fragrant, thin, soft mixture, made up of the black akil paste, the odorous kunkumum flower, civet, the excellent sandal paste, and paste made from the musk of the deer. On its way it rests for a while in the newly opened flower-buds of the pollen-laden water-lily. It then mixes with the smoke rising from kitchens, the smoke of the broad bazaar where numbers of cooks fry cakes in pans, the fragrant fumes rising from the terraces where live men and women, the smoke of sacrificial offerings and various other sweet fumes. . . . Do you hear the thundering sound of the morning drum, beaten with great éclat in the temple of Siva and other gods, and in the palace of the far-famed kings; do you also hear the chanting according to the established rules by Brahmanas who know the four Vedas, and the speech of penance performers engaged in instruction?’

The second is by Constance Sitwell, an Englishwoman still living, and describes the landscape of an Indian state:

‘We climbed the tower of yellowish clay and looked down from the roof over the country lying still in the faint rosiness of the sunset light. All along the roads were high hedges of loose pink roses. The dense blue-green of the crops ended abruptly where the water supply stopped. Long wavering lines of camels trooped towards the town, looking just the same colour as the sand they were treading on; a bevy of women swathed like bundles in their robes of weathered pink and red, rode in on slow-moving oxen. It was beautiful—I knew it was beautiful; but oh, the harshness of it! In my faint-hearted mood I saw everywhere signs of struggle and fight; no blades would grow here without water laboured for under the blazing sun; no sheep or goat could live here without the fear of wolf or jackal; no traveller was safe from robbers, no woman from men; no one could even ride at his ease because of the rents and chasms in the sun-baked ground. . . .

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'From the Armoury we went along shaded passages where scribes sat copying from ochre-coloured books. Their lined faces were bent downwards; they never looked up at us; their slender fingers went on with their fine writing. We came out into a court that was filled with the sound of music, and, looking up, we saw a little group of musicians sitting on a balcony singing in the sun. They made a bright jumble of blue turbans and coats pale green and rose; the sunshine glittered on their silver bracelets and toe-rings and ear-rings. They accompanied themselves on long lutes and little drums, and vaguely, continuously, their singing rose and fell. In the court there was perpetual movement. Men came from dark doors and gateways leading horses with high pointed saddles and bright bows tied round their legs.'

It may, however, be that, more even than its sensuous attraction, what gives India its power over the imagination is the fact that it is a kind of compendium of the world. Nearly all human experience, secular, religious and philosophical, may be found there. Thus it excites a veneration, as for a being who has known all the range of enjoyment and suffering, and who has preserved his memory and all his faculties:

*'I, Tiresias, have foresuffered all  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.'*

[ ii ]

Religion has for centuries haunted the Indian mind to the detriment of more worldly pursuits.

By contemporary Indians this is sometimes denied, since in the secular atmosphere of the modern world they believe that to indulge an exaggerated religious interest is to be weak or old-fashioned; and certainly India has had a stormy complicated secular history. But in the eyes of the world the cultivation of religion and philosophy has been India's principal achievement. They have been the national art just as the development of political institutions has been that of England. A curious sidelight is that there are said to be more words for philosophical and religious thought in Sanskrit than in Greek, Latin and German combined.

True change in India—change which indeed is perhaps now taking place—would be the ending of this bias of the national outlook. If that happens India will enter a new period: whether this is for better

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or worse people will decide for themselves according to their temperament. It is not that in the past the country had a static system of belief; the variety and change of religious ideas are indeed a main part of Indian history; the different religions have competed for supremacy; but there was continuity in that the national outlook was preoccupied with religion, whatever form this might take.

The Indian religious temperament developed three or four thousand years ago, or perhaps earlier, among a privileged and priestly caste. A tradition, established then, widened out and survived the many invasions and upheavals which the country afterwards experienced. Each of the sections into which the people of India are now divided, whether Hindus or Moslem, Sikh or Christian, Brahmin, merchant or warrior, whether speaking Urdu, Hindi or Tamil, reflects in some way a common Indian mind, and the more sophisticated the members of each community, the more they resemble each other. Many Indians would deny this, and indeed the differences between them are sharp and obvious; yet to the foreigner all have certain characteristics which stamp them as Indians.

The 'Indian mind' is different from and more comprehensive than Hinduism. But the Hindu mind was first in the field historically. It is the ancestral mind of all the later minds which India has evolved. To begin a study of the Indian temperament with an investigation of Hindu ideas is to recognize the relationship, and not to say that the related things are identical with one another.

The principal quality of Hindu religion at its highest level is mysticism. It teaches that the individual mind, or a special high part of the mind, is either identical with, or capable of being united with, a pervading spirit of the universe, and that this spirit is either God or ultimate reality. A favourite analogy is that as torches lit from a single fire are so many individual flames, yet each part of the original flame, so are all souls and indeed all being a part of a general being of the universe. Such a view is of course by no means peculiar to Hinduism. St. Paul describes men as being 'of the race of God', and Hindu mysticism is very similar in practice to that of Chinese and Christians. Where Hinduism differed from other religions was that mysticism was a chief interest.

The implications of mystical experience, the means by which the union of the soul and God could be achieved, of the identity of the soul and God could be recognized, these became the preoccupation of Hindu philosophy. The preoccupation was comparable with that of the western mind during the past three centuries with the nature



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of objective matter and motion. In earliest times the union was usually sought through spells, rites and austerities; later there were evolved a number of mental or spiritual disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

Hindu mystics have been generally of two types. One believes that the soul, while desiring union with Nature and with God, exists distinct from these; the other believes that the distinction between mind and what lies outside is a hallucination, and that to become aware of this is to gain peace and enlightenment. The mystic of the first kind sees God objectively in each created thing; the mystic of the second kind is an introvert deriving a sense of power as his intellect unravels the twists of the deluding world. But the final experience of the perfected mystic of each type is probably the same: self seems to dissolve and he is 'swallowed by the Divine Darkness'.<sup>2</sup>

The state of mind of the enlightened who have attained the mystical union is described as follows in the principal Hindu scripture:

'The learned look with indifference alike upon a wise and courteous Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog or an outcast man. . . . One indifferent to foe and to friend, indifferent in honour and in dishonour, in heat and in cold, in joy and in pain, free of attachment, who holds in equal account blame and praise, silent, content with whatsoever befall, homeless, firm of judgement, possessed of devotion; he who rejoices not, hates not, grieves not, desires not; he to whom pain and pleasure are alike, who renounces all undertakings, who abides in himself, to whom clods, stones or gold are alike; he whose mind is undismayed in pain, and who is freed from longings for pleasure.' Thus the soul is emancipated from the suffering and helplessness of mortal beings.

The Hindu gods themselves exist in this condition. It has been said that the whole genius of India lives in the picture of Siva, covered with ashes and with masses of neglected hair piled on the top of his head, indifferent to the world, bent only on thought.

<sup>1</sup> Lofty systems of thought often have their origin in incongruous material circumstances, and it may not be fantastic to see Hindu mysticism as resulting distantly from a crude practice of the most ancient Hindu priests. This was to induce an ecstasy by drinking a juice called soma; what it was made from nobody seems to know certainly; but under its influence the priests enjoyed the sensation of being possessed by a god. From this, as rational speculation grew, it would be a natural step to speculate on the possibility of union of the self with all being.

<sup>2</sup> Teachers of mystical discipline in India are to-day divided between two methods. One is to attain the mystical experience by a meditation whose essence is to make the mind a blank, absolutely passive, and therefore receptive. The other is to dissociate the god-like part of the mind, the spirit, from the mental and perishable part by systematically regarding every manifestation of this part as separate from the self.

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These beliefs affected the entire arrangement of Hindu life. Philosophers differed among themselves about how the religious life was best cultivated. But the usual view was that a man might reach a state of mystical perfection by any of three roads, by intellectual meditation, by emotional worship of God, or by the discharge of worldly duties provided this was done because of obligations and without regard to the aggrandisement of the self. Some held that all three roads must be travelled. The ideal Hindu life is divided into four stages—the first, of education, the second, life in the world, the third, meditation, the fourth renunciation of all worldly life. A life planned on this scheme might seem as sensible as that proposed by any other civilization and to promise an experience as varied. Certainly the Hindu way of life can still produce to-day men who are singularly and almost uncannily impressive. Of course they are rare; but although throughout history few Hindus have actually lived in the way laid down the wonder is that at all periods some have made the attempt to do so.

How difficult it was to succeed in the mystical life, whatever the technique adopted, is shown by the experience of Buddha who lived in the sixth century B.C. Though apparently he tried all the approved methods of mystical discipline, none of them brought him the satisfaction which he sought, and in seeking for it he evolved his new religion which has been described as a kind of protestant and iconoclastic Hinduism.

Besides these mystical beliefs and practices, Hinduism, like all other major systems of religion, had a metaphysic. This combined subtlety with extraordinary imagination, and its development was aided by two facts. The first was that Sanskrit, the classical language, was both very flexible and yet precise, making an ideal vehicle for speculation. The second was that Hinduism, unlike Christianity or Islam, does not attach great importance to any single historic fact, as these do to the Crucifixion or the mission of the Prophet; its beliefs derive not from any single dogmatic revelation, but are generalizations from observable religious experience extending over many centuries and perhaps beginning in a period very much remoter than the earliest known period in history. Because of this speculative, almost scientific attitude to religion, differences of opinion on many points are not explored; Hinduism had no obsession with proselytizing; and orthodoxy was more concerned with preserving a traditional social order than in securing uniformity of belief.

Hindu metaphysics are hard to describe because the basic concepts

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on which they rest are either unfamiliar to the West or, still more perplexing, are similar to the ordinary western ones but convey for the Hindu a rather different meaning. It has, however, been interpreted to the West many times in the past century, though the details are often controversial. In broad outline the picture is of a community of an infinite number of souls, each soul being incarnated countless times until it achieves union with God; each undergoing adventures in every life which may either advance or distract it in its search for fusion with deity; each enjoying or suffering in every life the consequences of action in previous existences; meeting perhaps again and again in successive lives other souls with which it became associated, whether in friendship, love or enmity;<sup>1</sup> being aided, if it is fortunate, by encounter with the more experienced souls, the Mahatmas, which defer for this purpose their own absorption in divinity. All the material world is the stage or properties for the spiritual drama, and the miseries of history need not be taken too tragically since even by the miseries they cause they may further souls upon their way to redemption.<sup>2</sup>

One curious feature must be noticed. Partly because their system excluded a paternal deity, rewarding and punishing, the philosophers produced an account of the natural world which can be reconciled with surprising ease with modern science. It is true that Hinduism has thousands of gods, but the Hindu philosopher regarded them as no more real than did the scientists of ancient Greece their own nymphs and fauns; to him the chief gods of Hinduism were symbols of the laws which regulated the universe. Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, and Siva the Destroyer represented the processes of coming-into-being, existence, and passing-away of which nature consists. Shown dancing on humanity, Siva, the 'Time that devours all things', says, 'I am not of a compassionate heart, nor is forgiveness congenial to my nature'. Such indeed is time and change. The universe as a flux in which law operates: the law as never changed: impersonal forces instead of gods: these are the concepts alike of Hindu philosophers and modern scientists.

Western philosophers can make many objections to Hindu reason-

<sup>1</sup> There is some doubt whether earthly love is an aid or hindrance to true spiritual advance.

<sup>2</sup> There is nothing quietist about Hinduism in its traditional form. Mr. Gandhi's pacifism stands to traditional Hinduism as Quakerism to Christianity. It has been remarked that the principal Hindu scripture was supposed to be delivered in a war chariot on the actual battlefield on the eve of slaughter. No other great scripture has such a dramatic setting.

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ing. But Hindu concepts have often seemed to possess a power of exciting men's minds so that they feel they are commercing with ideas more highly charged than in their ordinary speculation. Moreover some of the new concepts of western science now supplanting the old—supplanting them because experimental inquiry has disproved the old—are not very much unlike some of those which the Hindus invented two or three thousand years ago.

There is another characteristic of Hinduism which is not exactly of doctrine but which has given the religion a special stamp and colour. This is the cult of simplicity. If all the sophisticated religions of the world have denounced riches and cares as harmful to the soul, in India the practice of simple life has been carried, at least among Hindus, to exceptional lengths. This is true in spite of the luxury and debauchery of some classes. To sit on mats, to eat from plantain leaves, to be cumbered with the minimum of furniture, to economize effort, is the true Hindu tradition, and, uncomfortable and at times absurd as it appears to the western visitor, is a kind of humanism, since it prevents man's environment from engulfing him. Perhaps in no other country has mere wealth been respected so little as in India, however avid some Hindus may have been to acquire it.

### [ iii ]

This is certainly a very arbitrary and very much simplified statement of a complicated set of beliefs, and moreover it assumes a uniformity about them which perhaps does not exist. Hinduism has no set of dogmas whose orthodoxy is declared by a church—for it has no organized church—nor is there a canon of its scriptures. Hinduism is the system of ideas evolved in Hindu society and has been added to century by century. It includes several schools of thought, and the account given above is only of their common elements.

Certain interpretations of Hinduism which are popular in the West are questioned by Indians, or held to be exaggerations of Hindu doctrine; and one of the best ways of understanding Hinduism is to take some of these conventional western judgments and to notice the reply which would be made by contemporary Hindu scholars. A subtle visitor to India in this century, the late Mr. Lowes Dickinson, complained of Hinduism that it was non-humanistic. The Hindu, he said, is not, like the Westerner, concerned with the whole of man, his physical life, his moral life, emotional life, and his history and destiny, but with one particular part of man, his mind. 'Man', said Lowes

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Dickinson, 'in the Indian vision is a plaything and slave of natural forces; and only by claiming to be mind does he gain freedom and deliverance.' The westerner feels in Hinduism a kind of exalted inhumanity.

Another fairly common interpretation is that the Hindu thinker regards the world which exists in time as illusion—'Maya' is the term used—and believes that the only reality is a world beyond time, which can be apprehended only by a system of meditation. Plunged into this, the philosophical Hindu is supposed to lose interest in the world and to regard effort at its improvement as distraction from the more serious business of contemplation. This attitude, it is said, explains one of the peculiarities of Indian culture, the fact that there have been few Indian historians. 'How can you write the history of a nightmare?' said Lowes Dickinson, 'You won't do that. You try to wake up.'

A third view often expressed is that Hinduism leaves ethics out of account. If everything, even evil things, are part of God, evil as ordinarily understood can hardly exist. Indifference to ethics would follow naturally from a belief that all the external world is illusion, for in a world of shadows, moral obligation itself would be shadowy. One of the stoutest nationalists of the century, Tilak, the predecessor of Mr. Gandhi, seems to have asserted quite sincerely at the end of his life that he regarded politics as a kind of athletic sport and that they had nothing to do with morals as conceived by the West. Like some peculiar Christian sects and like many Russian mystics, some Hindu teachers argue that even the worst man can know God: some even that a kind of ritual sinning is a part of the way to perfection.

These are all current interpretations of parts of Hindu doctrine. While there is some truth in them, most Hindus would claim they were mistaken. The question of the reality or non-reality of the world is one on which Hindus themselves are much divided, but most would say that the world had at least a provisional reality. They might say too that even if the world is unreal, salvation is found by *acting* as if it was real, while *thinking* it to be illusion. They would deny that they favour inaction, and, as for ethics, they might say: 'Is not our principal holy book, the Bhagavad Gita, concerned chiefly with morals, and in a manner like that of the philosophical texts in the West, and is not its conclusion that by following the moral law a man comes ultimately to the vision of God?' And as for the alleged non-humanism, they could point to the tradition that a man must have lived a full life in the world before he can satisfactorily renounce the world.

Such were the ideas handed down from generation to generation of Hindus, such the cast of mind which they encouraged. To be sure, only a small minority in each generation lived at a high intellectual or religious level. But an atmosphere had been created. A Scotch lawyer who once startled the Church Assembly at Edinburgh by saying that he had sucked in the being and attributes of God with his mother's milk would in India have seemed to be expressing an everyday concept.<sup>1</sup> The main difference between the traditional Indian and the modern western outlook is that in the West mysticism is respected but regarded as an eccentricity, since it is thought that man's chief effort should be concentrated on the improvement of the present life, while in India the mystical life was regarded as the highest of which man was capable.

Everybody knew, even if vaguely, what was the discipline of the rishi or the yogi. It was an accepted ideal for a man to end his days in meditation. The most trivial acts of life became ritual; and religious taboos constantly hedged round the ordinary spontaneous relation of man and man. At the back of most men's beliefs was the conviction that the world they saw about them was the reflection of an unseen reality, like Plato's shadows on the wall; and the religious man, if vigilant, was thought able to detect in the events of daily life the intrusion of something happening beyond. Everything in the world was said to be literally part of God or a manifestation of God. 'All things are threaded upon Me as gems upon a string', says the god Krishna in the most revered of the scriptures. Literature never, and art only partially, emancipated themselves from religion, and the appetite of even those engaged in the most worldly pursuits has seemed insatiable for stories of saints and gods. For centuries the air has been heavy with devotional songs and the clangour of temple bells. The religious mendicant, and the practiser of austerities for the love of God, enjoyed respect and the certainty of support. Brahmins, the descendants of the ancient priests, enjoyed a peculiar reverence, even though few

<sup>1</sup> There was a rather similar theological atmosphere at one stage in the history of Byzantium. St. Gregory Nazianzen has described how, if you went into a shop in Constantinople to buy a loaf, the baker, instead of telling you the price, would argue that the Father is greater than the Son. The moneylender would talk about the Begotten and the Unbegotten, instead of giving you your money; and if you wanted a bath, the bath-keeper assured you that the Son surely proceeded from nothing. See Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Modern Europe*.

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of them performed any actual priestly function, and though their pretensions were often resented. In no other country were nature, and the processes of nature, so much venerated and so openly worshipped. Everybody had an ear for the strange story touching on the uncanny in any form. Everybody believed that there were latent powers in men which if released by a more or less secret technique enabled them to levitate, to read other people's minds, to bewitch men and animals, to foretell the future, to change their temperatures, to increase or lessen their size, to cure diseases, to hear distant sounds, to enter into the bodies of others, to check or reverse currents of water, to control hunger, thirst and sleep, to separate lovers, to stop all actions of others, to cause enemies to flee the country: even in extreme cases to gratify every desire the moment it rises, and to have as their servants the great Hindu gods. A wizard could reduce a buffalo to the size of a pea, induce his enemy to swallow this and then cause the buffalo to resume its true size, the enemy disintegrating. The land was drenched in holiness, here a holy river, there a shrine which had for ages been a centre of pilgrimage. Whole species of animals such as the monkey or peacock were regarded as sacrosanct. The Babylonian tradition of astrology flourished more strongly than in any other country. Spells, charms, amulets, the evil eye, the sinister practices of black magic, were the tale of every day. There was the sense of fate and doom. There was the certainty of reincarnation. Misfortunes in this life were accepted as being due to wickedness in previous lives: thus there may have been less pity at individual miseries than in other countries. •

In a country in which religious life was so luxuriant, religion could never be wholly dissociated from primitive and, to a western mind, rather shocking rites and usages. Indeed at many periods these have been made into a cult by the most sophisticated classes.

This was the civilization which over many centuries was built by the diverse peoples who were yet united in regarding themselves as Hindu. It clung to the country. Thus when invaders came who were not, like their predecessors, absorbed by the Hindus but retained their own alien culture, these also fell slowly under its power. The Moslems, for example, whose theology and principles in their original form are the opposite pole to those of the Hindus, especially in their central belief in a single and personal God, in their regard for human equality and in their strenuous extraversion, evolved nevertheless at one time in India a civilization which was a blend of Hinduism and Islam. It is true that a section of the Moslem community has

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always kept with complete purity the original Arab traditions of Islam; but others exposed themselves to the influences of the country, and without becoming Hindu, became Indian. They evolved, or at least developed, the Moslem mystical system called Sufism, which almost certainly borrowed many of its methods from Hindu Yoga; they accepted, too, the old Hindu idea that asceticism gives power, and some, like the Hindus, regarded God as immanent in the world, not transcendent. A Moslem saint expressed the central truth of the Indian tradition:

‘There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places, and I know they are useless, for I have bathed there.

‘The images of all are lifeless; they cannot speak: I know for I have cried aloud to them.

‘The Puranas and the Koran are mere words; lift up the curtain, I have seen.’

### [ v ]

A country which has for so long kept its mind on other-worldly things may well fascinate the western visitor. But India has paid a price for the rather one-sided development of its national life. Its mundane history, with its early achievement in politics, art and letters never quite equalled by what came afterwards, stands in odd contrast to its spiritual excellencies. This is not to say that Indian civilization remained static. Indeed it has changed constantly with a vigour of production with which any but the greatest country might be satisfied. But the earlier promise was not fulfilled. Indian civilization, after a brilliant start, seems to have had a long, slow running-down. Even in religion, there have been few original ideas in the last thousand years; energy has been spent in worship rather than in thought. This is not merely the unfriendly judgment of an alien. Jawaharlal Nehru, in whom the country to-day sees the national fire burn brightest, speaks in his recent book of the progressive deterioration through the centuries, and compares Indian life to a sluggish stream moving slowly through the accumulations of dead centuries. India, he says, was seized by a kind of coma.

For this slow banking of the national fires, may not the unworldly orientation of the Indian mind be at least partly responsible? The mind has been too rigidly directed in a certain way, and both its fixed interest in certain matters and its obstinate lack of interest in others stood in the way of new creation.



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For the decline of the creative vigour of a people, for a national sickness, it is, however, hardly enough to say merely that its national mind lost its force. The spirit of a country, and the mundane political institutions in which it is contained—these act constantly upon one another. What were the political institutions of India during this long decline?

## CHAPTER THREE



# TRADITIONAL INDIA: THE STATE

[i]

As the pattern of Indian thought was fixed early, and remained more or less stable, so did the political life follow a fixed pattern. In its long history, India passed through periods of catastrophe, at least one of which was as devastating as the Dark Ages in Europe, but in certain broad features the political life changed little.

Though Indian society was elaborately organized, the organization was for purposes which were not primarily political. Caste, which was a semi-religious institution, was the chief fact of Hindu social life, and its effects were politically baleful. They were to divide society into a multitude of groups each living its separate life. If the castes formed a hierarchy, it was not the kind of hierarchy which resulted in political cohesion. From remote times caste split rather than united society. Hence to the cultural unity of India there corresponded no political or social unity. In the terminology fashionable to-day, India was a plural society. It was several distinct communities, not one.

Caste has been much understood. Basically a caste is a group of families whose members can marry with each other and can eat in each other's company without believing themselves polluted. To eat with or marry a person of a lower caste is to be polluted. While a caste, especially an upper caste, is sometimes spread over a wide area, more often it belongs to a particular locality; sometimes, but by no means always, members of a caste tend to follow some particular occupation. The standard division of all Hindus into four main castes—priests or Brahmins, warriors, merchants, and cultivators—results from the attempt by past Hindu thinkers to make a rational

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scheme of Hindu society, and does not correspond to reality; each of these so-called main castes is really a category of castes in which hundreds of castes find their place.

What was the origin of this system, so complex, so unnecessary, has still not been fully and satisfactorily explained. Rudiments of caste exist in other countries but nowhere is it so set as in India, nowhere else is there such fear of defilement by contact with lower castes.

Though caste is a Hindu institution, it infected the life of all the non-Hindu parts of India, so that, when other religions grew up beside Hinduism, the people of these, breathing the air of caste, organized their own communities as exclusive societies. This happened the more easily because religion in the East is not only a set of intellectual beliefs, but the entire body of customs which a people observes.<sup>1</sup> In recent centuries, Islam has been the most powerful of these rival religions. Islam was never strong enough to convert Indians *en masse*, except in certain parts of the country; on the other hand it has not been weak enough to be strangled or absorbed by Hinduism. Thus Hindus and Moslems formed something like separate nations, suspicious, antagonistic, even though, as stated in the last chapter, all of them had in common certain peculiarly Indian habits of thought, and though there was always much exchange of custom, and at many periods fraternization and borrowing of one another's saints. The Moslem did not feel himself his Hindu brother's keeper. Emphatically, Indians were not all members one of another. They had no common purpose.

And not only caste and religion divided Indian society. Geography, its sway over a people more persistent than that of any custom or religion, divided the huge country into several distinct regions, each of which had little to do with the others. Language, since Babel the principal author of discords, also divided: India has twelve main languages, and over two hundred dialects. Another cause of division was the invasions which India had suffered, especially in the North. Each resulted in a stratum of one-time conquerors who felt themselves separate from the rest of the country, even though sometimes the reason for their isolation had vanished from their minds.

<sup>1</sup> I have met a Moslem in Bombay who declined to eat melons because he could not discover a scriptural guidance whether they should be scooped out or cut in two; and I was told in Persia of converts to Christianity who were bewildered because they could not discover whether Christ permitted or frowned on the custom of whistling.

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In a country so organized, or rather so fragmented, the lack of political institutions proper—institutions binding the people together in a common political unity—is hardly surprising. As Dr. Johnson would have said, Indians were not 'clubbable men'. They have not organized themselves as citizens. The moral obligation of which a man was conscious was to advance the interests of his family: his duties were limited to that: they were not to the state. Politically, India has been the most individualist of all countries.

Where there was a multitude of groups, conscious of their separateness from one another, there could scarcely be the conception of a majestic law of the land holding all citizens together in a common obedience. Where men were so divided from each other that they did not easily meet together and sympathize, the ordinary man could hardly be expected to feel a passion for social justice, a sense of human equality, a moral responsibility for all other men in the country. Beyond the limits of the village, there was no such code of public morals as is found in close-knit societies; and there could in general be no political public opinion. There was none of the criss-cross of groups such as in western countries have existed to promote various objects for the community considered as a whole. The towns, though often magnificent, never produced a bourgeoisie with a will for power over the entire community. There was no feudal system providing a social bond.<sup>1</sup> There were no guilds with ambitions beyond the protection of their own interests. So strong was the antipathy to political organization that the Hindu religion itself was never embodied in a hierarchical church, for a church is, or at least resembles, a political institution. Buddhism, the offshoot of Hinduism, had its ecclesiastical councils, but these in time withered.

One exception needs perhaps to be made in recording this politically unorganized state of Indian society. This is of the village councils or panchāyats. In nearly all old agricultural societies, villages have developed a system of self-government by the village elders. In India over much of the country this was perhaps more thorough and more systematic than elsewhere. When the British administration was set up it was found that in parts of North India the rural society consisted virtually of a federation of village republics ruled by the panchayats, served by hereditary village officers and hereditary police, and lightly presided over by the monarchical government; and so, apparently,

<sup>1</sup> Some writers have detected a feudal system in the part of India called Rajputana. But for the curious nature of this society, and its merely pseudo-feudalism, see the writings of Sardar K. M. Panikkar.

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it had been for centuries. Inscriptions show that panchayats existed in the south also. Yet the extent to which the panchayat system prevailed can be exaggerated. Over very considerable areas no trace at all can be found that it ever existed. Certainly the panchayats demonstrated that the Indian people did not in propitious circumstances lack the capacity to organize themselves locally for public affairs such as justice, police, and the building of tanks, roads, bridges and forts; but on this foundation rose no superstructure of national government. Nor was this surprising because large agrarian Empires have never been fertile ground for representative institutions.

These were the underlying facts of the social organization which for more than two thousand years remained surprisingly constant throughout the stormy rise and fall of states and dynasties.

### [ ii ]

These facts of India's social organization governed most of its political history.

They stood in the way of unification. It is true that there have been great empires, covering much but never the whole of the country. But the organization of such structures was of a loose and feudal kind. Empires rose, endured for a period of two or three centuries, then crashed, and were dispersed. For most of recorded history, India has been divided between competing small states.

Because of the loose organization of society, monarchy was for these states the only practicable form of government. There could be no conception of a government organized by, and resting on the consent of, the general body of citizens.<sup>1</sup> And the sole important task of the monarch was to repress violence.

Sometimes he succeeded; Indian history is full of kings venerated for their stern justice; but often the king himself was the worst offender in lawlessness, and his subjects groaned. 'The ploughers ploughed upon their backs, and made long furrows.' Only the inefficiency of government prevented its heaviness from being greater than it was. Moreover, since it was unstable, it could give no guarantee of lasting peace—and when it fell, there was nothing to take its place.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Certain theories of popular government may have been evolved by the early Buddhists. But they had small influence on India's history.

<sup>2</sup> It may be argued that the heavy hand of government was itself the cause of the failure of society to organize its own self-governing institutions. But society was fatally hampered by the caste system.

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Beyond repressing disorder and doing justice, government attempted little. Legislation as conceived to-day, the constant changing of social relations according to a policy, was not a concern of the Indian kings. Their function was to maintain the traditional customs of society. They were strong against the individual subject, but weak to build anything out of society; with the British who succeeded them the case was to be the reverse. Nobody expected that by means of political action life could be made better. The belief was that history moved in cycles, not in a progress towards a better world; a curious result was that in Indian literature there are no Utopias. Always, too, the government was expensive, raising the maximum revenue. The relatively poor peasant society supported a multitude of courts whose dazzling display was that for which, next to religion, India became celebrated in the rest of the world.

One of the legacies of the old system has been fear. Because the monarchical government was often weak, or broke down, violence was always round the corner; and the strong preyed on the weak. At least in recent centuries, men have lived on tenterhooks; until the opposite was proved, they suspected that a stranger was an enemy. They lived entrenched. They took no chances. Fear, which thus is in the marrow of the Indian bones, is the origin of the quality which has struck so many observers of the country—the difficulty people find in co-operating, and their mistrust of each other.

In these shortcomings of the political and social institutions at least as much as in the peculiar Indian mind lay the reason for the drying up through the centuries of the Indian national energy.<sup>1</sup>

### [ iii ]

A more concrete account of the traditional Indian government may perhaps be interesting.

The small states into which the famous Moghul Empire broke up in the eighteenth century, and which the East India Company annexed or rendered tributary one by one, are typical of those which had succeeded one another in endless process for hundreds of years. The eighteenth century, though a time of trouble, is wrongly regarded

<sup>1</sup> The attempt is sometimes made to explain the unsatisfactory political life of India as the result of its unworldly outlook. It is argued that if a man exists in a sort of theological trance, then the events of this life seem unimportant. He does not stand up for his rights. But, though there may be something in this theory, it is hardly the key to Indian history. Other countries also have suffered despotism without the accompaniment of Hindu metaphysics.

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as a time of exceptional decadence in India. That there was a political and moral decline is true: but India had known many such periods and artistically it was an age of considerable achievement. As has been pointed out by one of the best critics of to-day, Italy in the late Renaissance, France in the reign of Louis XVI—ages of high civilization but with a background of impending revolution—are the true parallels. Palaces which, if no longer as magnificent as in the previous century, were still grandiose romantic fantasies; the cult of an ideal world of dream and ecstasy; a lyrical school of painting; music, dance, a world of fountains, night, trees, and singing birds; the development of Urdu literature; an ascetic mysticism which was the final result of a satiated cult of beauty and sensation—these the courts of eighteenth-century India fostered, even if their statesmen and soldiers, often over-refined, were becoming less competent to hold in check the natural turbulence of the country, finding indeed the work of government distasteful and fit only for barbarian soldiers and clerks, and relying ever more on intrigue to prevent disaster rather than on force or reform.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the states were described in detail by the English diplomatic representatives of the time; and their accounts show what was Indian society in the last days before the engine of western influence was turned upon it. It happened that one which received special attention, the powerful State of Indore, enjoyed and suffered within two generations one of the best and one of the worst types of Indian sovereign. Thus it exhibits conveniently the good and bad in the Indian political tradition.

Indore was under a Maratha dynasty. The Marathas were a Hindu agricultural people of central India who, by the leadership of captains of genius, built an empire on the ruins of the Moghul State; from them, indeed, rather than from the Moghuls, the British conquered the paramount position in India. The Maratha Empire was at first united, but, as all tends to fall apart in India, it soon became a confederacy of a number of separate states, and of these Indore was one of the chief.

For thirty years, at the end of the eighteenth century, the State was governed by a woman, Alahi Bhye, the first of the two rulers referred to above. She had taken over authority when her son, the reigning prince, died while still young and without an heir. The death of this

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Goetz, the critic mentioned, cites as examples of eighteenth-century architecture the palaces at Jaipur, Lucknow, and Dig, and certain buildings at Jodhpur.

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young man was itself curious. A humorous prince, who had amused himself by placing scorpions in the clothes and slippers given to Brahmins, and venomous snakes in the pots of rupees given to them, he killed an embroiderer whom he believed the lover of one of his concubines. Soon afterwards he went mad, and it was accepted that he was possessed by the spirit of the embroiderer; and though his mother offered to build a temple for the ghost, all efforts to pacify it were in vain. A voice coming from the prince's mouth was heard to say, 'He slew me and I will have his life.' The threat was soon fulfilled.

Alahi Bhye thereupon took over the government, crushing opposition by the aid of a general named Tukoji. Her relation with this soldier, from then on commander-in-chief of her armies, showed how even in the lawless India of her day force was not the only instrument of government. While he remained the source of her power, and carried on the external relations of the State, she was the undisputed chief internally. In the world of jungle politics which followed the fall of the Moghul Empire, she demonstrated, like a last brilliance of the sun at its setting, all the traditional virtues of the Hindu sovereign. Ascetic, pious, capable, she gave her people the contentment and peace which, had it been universal throughout India, would have rendered the British conquest impossible, or at least have stamped it as infamous. She conducted herself rather like a female St. Louis. Her piety was her strength. Rising every day an hour before dawn, she spent the morning at her prayers, in performing ceremonies, distributing alms, and feeding Brahmins. Her surplus revenues were spent on building temples at the remotest holy places in India. Within the State men were stationed on the highways to offer water to travellers or even to ploughing oxen; and other officers were sent to feed the birds which farmers had driven from their fields.

Surrounded by the aura of her piety, her State became a sort of holy ground, safe from attack. The British Resident, Sir John Malcolm, who described her reign, quotes a Brahmin who said of her: 'Whether Alahi Bhye, by spending double the money on an army that she did in charity and good works, could have possessed her country for above thirty years in a state of profound peace, while she rendered her subjects happy and herself adored, may well be questioned. No person doubts the sincerity of her piety; but if she had merely possessed worldly wisdom, she could have devised no means so admirably calculated to effect the object. I was in one of the principal offices at Poona during the last years of her administration, and know



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well what feelings were excited by the mere mention of her name. Among the princes of her own nation, it would have been looked upon as sacrilege to become her enemy.'

In her administration of the State she was conservative, humane, frugal, and left the regulation of local affairs chiefly to the panchayats and the hereditary local officers. Old rights were respected, the State took no more than its recognized due. Subordinate officials, if they had proved their worth, were continued in their positions for long periods, an exception to the practice of other Indian governments at the time when office, being saleable, changed hands so quickly that no proper administration was possible. She declared herself answerable to God for every excessive use of power by her officers, and though in most things orthodoxy itself, abandoned purdah and held each day open durbar to receive petitions, one of the oldest and best traditions of Indian kingship. She reduced capital punishment to a minimum.

She was a plain, almost ugly, woman, and this was a comfort to her rivals. Malcolm wrote:

'A rival Maratha queen sent a servant to see her, who reported: "Alahi Bhye has not beautiful features, but a heavenly light is on her countenance." "But she is not handsome, you say," was the reply of her mistress, who was thus consoled.'

Such was Hindu kingship at its best.

[ iv ] .

'We now proceed', wrote Malcolm, after describing her death, 'to notice those destroyers who came to ruin the fair prospects which her government had opened to the inhabitants of her dominions.' The prodigy among these was Jaswant Rao, the illegitimate son of Alahi Bhye's loyal general, Tukoji.

If Alahi Bhye resembled St. Louis, Jaswant Rao was like Richard III or the Italian princes of the Renaissance. Power was his aim, he had great obstacles to overcome in gaining it but his energies were huge, his ruthlessness and personal magnetism no less peculiar. This combination of circumstances could not but produce convulsions. On the deaths of Alahi Bhye and Tukoji he and three brothers competed for the succession: neighbouring Maratha princes intervened from outside: two of the brothers perished, one became a puppet Maharajah in the hands of the Maharajah of Gwalior, and Jaswant Rao was outlawed. Hunted through the jungle, he escaped capture.

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For a time he had even to beg clothes. At length, followers began to join him. He paid a visit to his old tutor who gave him a chestnut mare which became almost a legendary figure and later, by his order, an object of worship as the origin of his good fortune. By drawing to him a horde of the masterless soldiers who abounded in India at this time, but above all by the fire and force of his personality, he was able, if not to recover and take over ordered government in his principality, at least for six or seven years to plunder it. About this time he lost an eye: one-eyed men in India are notoriously evil. 'I was before bad enough', he said, 'but I shall now be the high priest of rogues.' Shortly afterwards he poisoned his nephew; and all expression of disapproval was repressed from dread.

His last years were spent in war with the British, with whom the Maratha states had come into conflict. He believed that the chance of Maratha victory lay in reviving the earlier custom of the Marathas of living as a guerrilla horde.

'He commenced casting cannon', wrote Malcolm, 'and attempting changes and improvements in his army, with an ardour and violence which decidedly indicated insanity, the crisis of which it no doubt accelerated. It was at first observed that his memory failed, and that he became every day more impatient and outrageous in his temper.' Like Peter the Great he laboured at his foundries and furnaces, and cast two hundred pieces of brass ordnance in four months; like Peter also he was a great drinker, and the liquor shops of Bombay were drained by his demand for cherry and raspberry brandy. He superintended every detail of the reorganization of his army, was out at daylight drilling troops, measured recruits with his own hands, and anticipated the recent war by using live ammunition in training.

His inner fire in the end burned him out. He realized his failing powers. 'What I say one moment, I forget the next,' he said. 'Give me physic.' He ordered the death penalty so often that his ministers began to ignore his commands. One night all his harem fled, and he was found raving mad and trying to hide in a bundle of clothes. Twenty or thirty men were needed to bind him. His madness was generally put down to his having plundered a famous Hindu temple. For one year he continued violent; then fell into a childish condition during which he became perfectly docile, was fed with milk, and looked after by one female attendant. After two years he died.

This prince was well educated; understood Persian, wrote Marathi with great correctness, and was a quick and able accountant. His qualities as a leader were courtesy, wit, power of flattery, inflexible

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courage, generosity, and above all high spirits. To those who served him he was loyal, but he preferred as favourites the worst men. In pursuing his object of power he was quite merciless. Both in character and in the circumstances in which he found himself he was like Cesare Borgia; as Cesare Borgia was supposed to have the ambition of uniting Italy, so Jaswant Rao the ambition of restoring the unity of the Marathas.

While he survived, no ordinary administration was possible either in his own State or in the bordering ones which he attacked. Government was dissolved into guerrilla armies: the people became their prey. His officers assessed their victims by the feel of their skin: the softer it was, the more they were condemned to pay. In the long history of India Jaswant Rao is, it is true, an insignificant figure, but he is a type which has recurred constantly, vigorous, gifted, deadly to his people. The epitaph on the tomb of a greater conqueror might in his lesser sphere have suited Jaswant Rao. 'If I was alive again, the world would be sorry.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the tomb of Timur.

## CHAPTER FOUR



# THE BRITISH IN INDIA

[ i ]

**T**he British, on becoming supreme in India, found a country unlike Europe of their time but resembling in many respects the Europe of the Middle Ages, though only a few understood this. The absence of a sense of nationalism, which had made the British conquest possible; the disposition of the Indian to think of himself as belonging to a caste or a religious community rather than to a country or nation; the numerous petty states, some in their organization like the feudal kingdoms of medieval Europe, others like the petty tyrannies of Italy at the Renaissance; the profusion of chieftains, each with his following bound to him chiefly by the personal tie; religion pressing into every corner of life, as did the Catholic Church; the veneration of holy men and of enthusiastic religious practices—the parallels with medieval Europe are as striking as they are extensive.

The question with which the British administrators were therefore faced was whether they should set themselves the arduous and discouraging task of modernizing and reforming this medieval land, imposing on it a modern government, or whether they should, as was in some ways easier, leave its ancient institutions intact and govern through them, acting as the sustainers and revivers of the traditional Empire of India. Ideally the British rule of India should have resulted in a marriage of what was of great value in Indian civilization, its philosophical and mystical tradition, to a more up-to-date and humane political system by which the philosophical life might have been stimulated afresh. How far was this in fact achieved?

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[ ii ]

British action varied at different times. There were always conflicting trends of policy and conflicting views among civil servants. But it is possible to divide British rule into three periods, in each of which a certain attitude prevailed.

For the first fifty years of the British Raj—after the early excesses of the period of conquest had been ended and British rule became respectable—British officers remembered how solid and awe-inspiring had seemed the Moghul Empire which they succeeded, and to what extent their own coming to supremacy had been due to juggling, chicanery and luck. Therefore they regarded their position as precarious and their Empire as probably a very temporary one. Some of the chief architects of the administration of the Raj were among the chief to take these rather pessimistic views; Sir Thomas Munro, an eminent soldier and Governor of Madras, is an example. They were disposed to raise no unnecessary enemies by going against the ancient ways of the country. Also, since in this period the British Raj produced more notable scholar administrators than any other Empire in history, many of the new officials, properly free from any sense of racial superiority, dealt with India with a certain tender respect as with one of the centres of world civilization. Having discovered a new world different from Europe, a still living world with a life like that of the ancient Empires described by Herodotus, they desired often to preserve it as in a museum. If at times they were shocked by the customs they found, as by suttee, they were ready to chronicle these with a scientific interest rather than with contempt.

This mood changed as the nineteenth century advanced and the first age of British rule turned slowly into a second. One cause was that the British had become flushed by the recent material and mechanical advances in England. Another cause was the fashionable Utilitarian philosophy. Utilitarianism demanded from governments that they were to wipe away superstition and turn all nations into societies of thrifty freemen, with a scientific spirit, each man hunting his own advancement and happiness in the assurance that the happiness of all was thereby best achieved. The utilitarian ideas were trained on India first by James Mill, an official of the London establishment of the East India Company, and Macaulay, Law Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council in the eighteen-thirties. Their altruistic zeal for reform quenched natural sympathy. James Mill, for example, wrote a history of India which, almost forgotten to-day,

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moulded and darkened the Victorian ideas on the country. It is full of contempt for almost every feature of Indian civilization, both Hindu and Moslem. It assumed that if India were to be improved all that was good must come from outside, nothing or very little being salvaged from the Indian foundation. Its sentiments were expressed with a vigour which, when it is read to-day, makes it hard to believe that the book was taken seriously, 'No people', wrote Mill, 'how rude or ignorant so ever, who have been so far advanced as to leave us memorials of their thoughts in writing, have ever drawn a more gross and disgusting picture of the universe than what is presented in the writings of the Hindus.' Yet this book became a kind of manual for the British in India, and indeed especially for those who considered themselves as the most humane and advanced. Wishing to serve India, they gave the impression that they were willing to touch it in its present state only with a pair of tongs.

Even more unsympathetic to India than the secular philanthropists was another of the groups which at that time had great influence on opinion and policy, the Christian missionaries. If the British had conquered India in the early seventeenth century when English religious interest was at its height they would almost certainly have tried to convert their subjects to Christianity as the Portuguese did in Goa and the Spaniards in America; and almost certainly their empire would have come early to grief. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Christian zeal was more mixed with worldly prudence. Indeed at the end of the eighteenth century the East India Company had succeeded in excluding Christian missionaries from its territories, since at that time, when conservative views prevailed, the Company feared more the danger from Indians if invited to renounce their gods than the wrath from heaven if the Company was lukewarm in proselytizing. But as the godly spirit grew in nineteenth-century England it caused the home government to reverse the decision of the Company, and partly but never wholly subdued the caution of the administration in India. The Protestant evangelists, who thereupon began to appear in considerable but not embarrassing numbers, were apt to think that the Hindu gods were real devils, and that the Indians had become a subject people as a penalty for their wickedness.

*'Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou has destroyed the wicked,  
Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.'*

At this time Lord Shaftesbury proposed that an Indian should be appointed as official astronomer in order that by contemplating the

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stars his mind should be turned towards the true God. This might surely be regarded as the supreme example in history of teaching one's grandmother to suck eggs. Dr. Spear in his book, *The Nabobs in India*, has given examples of other extravagances.

The belief in the inferiority of India, which thus became accepted by the administration in this second period, resulted in an enthusiasm for the country's total reform, a task which might have appalled any generation less optimistic than the mid-Victorians and with more understanding of anthropology. Its spirit was best expressed by the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie who, though a man of action and not a philosopher, proved the sword arm of the theoreticians. But this second period was ended by the great Indian Mutiny of 1857, blamed on the over-impetuosity of the reformers which had stirred Indian feeling to an angry retort.

The third period, which lasted until quite recent times, was again conservative. Zeal for innovation was checked, and Indian institutions, while still not regarded with any respect by the great majority of the British officers, were recognized as having teeth and a power of self-defence which in the previous time had not been suspected. To assail them too openly was to cause too much danger. From this followed a mixture of toleration and contempt. The British had lost any clear conception of what they wanted to change India into, and as time went on confined themselves in general to maintaining day-to-day administration. This was the least profitable period of British rule and, because many archaic institutions were buttressed, the most injurious to the Indian national spirit. To this period belong few of the great Viceroys, and very few of the notable administrators or the scholarly officers who had given so much credit to the earlier periods of British rule.

### [ iii ]

In spite of this conservatism which dominated both the first and third periods of British rule, great changes in fact took place in India, often unforeseen and unintended by the Government, but due to its actions.

'It is by its indirect and for the most part unintended influence', wrote Sir Henry Maine, the author of *Ancient Law*, 'that the British power metamorphoses and dissolves the ideas and social forms underneath it, nor is there any expedient by which it can escape the duty of rebuilding upon its own principles that which it unwillingly des-

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troys. . . . We do not destroy in mere arrogance. We rather change because we cannot help it. Whatever be the nature and value of that bundle of influences which we call Progress, nothing can be more certain than that, when a society is once touched by it, it spreads like a contagion.<sup>1</sup>

The action of the British was chiefly upon the two-thirds of the country which they administered directly. But even in the remaining third, where Princes were left as the government but ruled under British influence exercised through the Residents, the changes which took place in British India repeated themselves, though more slowly and less radically. Princely India has been always a kind of muffled echo of British India. The larger states became copies of British Indian provinces, though often, it is true, camouflaged to appear as such rather than in fact reformed. In the minor states every antique vice of power survived. Though in number a multitude, they made up only a small part of the whole of princely territory.

British action divides itself into two compartments, destruction and creation. In one of its guises, British influence was one of the principal disintegrating forces which have ever been turned upon an old society though it was never for long the intention that it should be so. It hammered and pulverized, transforming the ancient body of custom and public opinion which in the last analysis is what causes men to act as they do as members of society. It broke many of the old links between man and man, leaving men as so many separate atoms; and the problem ever since has been to bind them up again into society by new principles.

### [ iv ]

The destruction of the old is glimpsed in the reminiscences and travel books of the nineteenth century. In the part of the country which the British governed directly, the princely dynasties were removed. Some of the former rulers survived as country landlords, and some lived on in the cities as more or less indigent pensioners, a spectacle which the philosophical visitor to India was usually anxious to see. Here is *The Times* correspondent in 1858 on the greatest of this class, the Moghul Emperor, descendant of Timur and Jenghiz Khan, but at this time after the Mutiny a prisoner in Delhi Fort. He was a poet whose merit did not depend on flattery for its detection.

<sup>1</sup> Maine was one of the successors of Macaulay as Law Member of the Government of India. His time in India was the seventh decade of the century.



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Because of this and of his misfortune he has been compared to Henry V's captive, the Duke of Orleans.

'In a dingy passage there sat crouched on his haunches a diminutive attenuated old man, dressed in an ordinary and rather dirty muslin tunic, his feet bare, his head covered by a thin cambric skull cap. The moment of our visit was not propitious, certainly it was not calculated to invest the descendant of Timur with any factitious interest, or to throw a halo of romance round the infirm creature who was the symbol of extinguished empire. In fact, the ex-King was sick; with bent body he seemed nearly prostrate over a brass basin into which he was retching violently. . . . The qualms of the King at last abated. He broke silence. Alas! It was to inform us that he had been very sick and that he had retched so violently that he had filled twelve basins. This statement could not, I think, have been strictly true, and probably was in the matter of numeration tinctured by the spirit of oriental exaggeration, aided by the politic imagination of His Majesty. . . . I tried in vain to let my imagination find out Timur in him. But as he sat before us, I was only reminded of the poorest form of the Israelitish type as exhibited in decay and penurious greed in its poorest haunts among us. His hands and feet were delicate and fine, his garments scanty and foul— His youngest begum said of him: "Why, the old fool goes on as if he was a king; he's no king now. I want to go away from him. He is a troublesome, nasty, cross old fellow, and I'm quite tired of him." But the ex-Emperor merely asked one of his attendants for a piece of coffee-cake or chocolate, put a small piece in his mouth, mumbled it, smiled, and, pointing with his thumbs over his shoulder in the direction from which the shrill accents of queenly wrath were coming, said, "Allah, listen to her."'

With the princes disappeared the classes which had grown round and were dependent on the courts, the bearers of much of Indian culture and tradition. Indeed, in parts of the country, the sweeping away of the upper strata was so complete that it could almost be compared with that in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. Though there are still to-day great landlords, most of the present landowning class are new men, the larger part of the former landed class having for one reason or another been dispossessed during the course of the century. Sons of potentates became clerks or even beggars. The troops of military adventurers, singers, artists, craftsmen, pimps, vanished; and therewith the tradition, flavour, sights, colours and decorum of Indian civilization changed. The arts collapsed and Indians either forgot or despised their heritage. In dress the old gaudy

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appearance of British India turned to a uniform dull white and grey, which still contrasts soberly with the brightness of the Indian States.<sup>1</sup>

Steep as was the fall of the privileged classes, it was not perhaps more calamitous than had taken place in the past when successive invaders had overrun different parts of the country. In the Moslem States a hereditary aristocracy had hardly existed, and each new generation was new men. But the Moslems, accepting the tradition of the country, had always recreated the court life, and an age died only to be born again; under the British, dead India was to stay dead.

Even in the villages there was upheaval. Former invasions had left the peasant life more or less unchanged from what it was in most ancient times, but the British regime affected the very roots of national life. The new government, its vigorous hands reaching everywhere, touched and destroyed, though inadvertently and with the best intentions, the age-old institution which had been the centre of rural government. This was the panchayat, the informal village council at which everybody knew everybody else, truth was open, and public opinion decided the common action and disciplined the local undesirables. The panchayats had existed, it is true, only in certain parts of India: successive invasions and wars seem to have killed them elsewhere. Where they had survived, the British government is seen at the beginning of the nineteenth century making up its mind whether to govern the rural areas as its predecessors had done, through the hierarchy of petty officers—village headmen, accountants, constables, and so on, officers of the village rather than of government, defending its customs, and carrying out the will of the panchayat—or to substitute for them a new corps of petty bureaucrats, appointees of its own. It decided on the latter course; and in a little while the old hierarchy melted away; the panchayats, their work transferred to government officers and judges, ceased to meet. Thus the worst feature of Indian social life, the lack of natural

<sup>1</sup> India in the first period under British rule might well be described by the following passage by Burke, which in fact describes France after the revolution. 'Every person in the country, in a situation to be actuated by a principle of honour, is disgraced and degraded, and can entertain no sensation of life, except in a modified and humiliated indignation. But this generation will pass away. The next generation of the nobility will resemble the money-jobbers and usurers who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters. Those who attempt to level never equalize. They load the edifice of society by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground.' This says in other words what is a common allegation about British rule in India, namely, that it transferred power from the kshattriya or warrior to the bania or moneylender.

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cohesion and of social action by the people themselves, was aggravated.

The first results were an increase in crime and disastrous delays and miscarriages of justice. Relations between government and people became a kind of blind man's bluff, government striking out as if blindfold and causing the most surprising consequences. An English judge, looking back on what had been done, remarked that to an Indian there might have seemed no particular reason in importing foreigners at vast expense to confer on the country the benefits of anarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, whatever part of nineteenth-century India is looked at, the view is of a dying world. Not only government action but the rather violent play of new and almost uncontrolled economic forces blew and scattered the old world apart. The new markets, techniques, communications, and rapidly changing prices, turned traditional India upside down.

Of course, not all the old institutions perished, and even at the very end of the British Raj more of what was archaic in Indian society had survived than had vanished. These survivals are indeed still the bar to India functioning as a normal modern State. They are the clue to its eccentricities which perplex the observer; the nuisance which they cause will remind the observer that the destructive power of the British was on the whole beneficent. Chief among these ancient remnants is the caste system, with its baleful effect in dividing society into fragments. Sometimes it is said that because of the influence of modern life, the caste system is breaking down, and certainly some of the old taboos are weakening, but, as one of the wisest observers of contemporary India has said, caste has become entangled in politics and for this reason Hindus are apt to be more conscious of their

<sup>1</sup> The decision to supersede the panchayat administration by a more bureaucratic rural administration was not taken without controversy. For example, Sir Thomas Munro, a Governor of Madras, denounced its effect in a document which is still the best analysis of early British rule in rural India. But he protested in vain. The government, believing the country to be in a desperate way after years of civil war, felt it necessary to meet what seemed to be the most pressing needs—that is, to raise revenue and repress violence. It knew at this time little about the custom of the country, and made regulations for the Indian peasant as if he were an English farmer. The headmen were henceforward its local agents even if, as often happened, they were drawn from the families in whom the office had been hereditary. Mrs. Besant is said to have remarked shrewdly that 'the words *paid by Government* mark the gulf between the English and Indian village systems'. The villages still remember their panchayats. Recently, in a village near Delhi, the elders, on being asked what used to be discussed in the panchayats, replied: 'Skirmishes with the Moghuls.'

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caste than ever before. Other features of the past civilization which survived were the discord between Hindus and Moslems, the linguistic divisions, the joint family, and the various religious beliefs which stand in the way of human equality and energetic action. Their elimination, which may not be possible without grave commotions, will perhaps be the main theme of Indian history later in the century. Less invidious ancient customs also continued, such as the cult of asceticism, the belief in the value of even a glimpse of a holy man, pilgrimage, and ritual bathing. Yet even in the social and religious life there was at the end of the period of British rule either change or the anxious conservatism which showed that change was in the air.<sup>1</sup>

### [ v ]

British rule had also a creative side. This affected the country no less deeply than did the destruction which had taken place. Because they destroyed so much, the British had to rebuild. Even where the British officers intended to be conservative and tried to reassemble the old scattered machinery of the State and to make it function again, it fell to pieces as they tinkered. The very repair was often new construction, and the value of what was built is not to be underrated.

It used to be said that the most obvious gift by the British to India had been a political unity much securer than in the past. The bane of Indian society, noticed in the last chapter, had been its tendency to fall apart, and divisions have had on the whole a deplorable consequence on its civilization. India too, like China, found difficulty in holding itself together because of its very size; no Empire before the British, not even the Moghul, had unified the entire country even formally, let alone administered it effectively. But a long period of actual British rule through the length and breadth of the land had seemed at one time to have established in the Indian public mind the axiom that India was henceforth to remain united. Unhappily, the axiom proved untrue when British rule ended. The Indian sub-continent promptly became two countries, India and Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup> Behind the feverish modern front, the ancient India is even to-day very much alive. In the countryside the tempo of life is slow: men are interested in each others' souls: they go on pilgrimages: they discuss religion under the shade of the ubiquitous clumps of trees which are the distinguishing mark of the Indian countryside: they respect Sadhus more than politicians. The Himalayas still fascinate the national imagination, and frail old men undertake the most fantastic religious journeys, without money and clad only in a blanket. Temples and mosques are still being built: contrast this with even pre-Communist China where nobody built new temples, though Christian converts built churches.

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A more enduring achievement may have been the construction of a modern machinery of government. The old link between man and man had been fear or personal loyalty; the new link was by means of institutions. In general the builders of the new administration, because they were nineteenth-century Englishmen with nineteenth-century ideas, produced by instinct remedies and institutions which, broadly speaking, were liberal, and only modified them as far as seemed necessary for security in an oriental State. Hence what has appeared the paradox of imperialist rulers busily setting up institutions which were different from those which an authoritarian government might have been expected to foster, and which indeed could only end by subverting such a government.

Chronologically the state building activity of the British falls into two parts. The first, which dates from the earlier period of British government, was the establishment of the rule of law. Government by law has been the peculiar mark of English political practice and influence. As Dicey remarked, the singularity of England has been not so much the goodness or the leniency as the legality of its system of government. The rule of law, which signifies several different things, is taken here to mean that government binds itself to act according to rule; that it does not take arbitrary action against its citizens; that no man is punishable except for a distinct breach of law; and that law, not persons, is supreme, the task of the functionary being merely to administer the codes.

It would be folly to pretend that British government never used the methods of self-preservation traditional in the Orient. Some of the provisions of law gave the government a power of high-handed action which would never have been tolerated in England except in time of war; at the lower levels of justice, judiciary and executive were not strictly separated. Nevertheless, because of the legal system, the subject in India was in fact guaranteed, to a far greater extent than was known before in Asia, against arbitrary proceedings by the executive. He enjoyed within wide limits freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from fear of arbitrary arrest. To this extent British rule promoted individual liberty, even if it did not at first accord the liberty of self-government.

The rule of law operated by means of the law codes and the courts. Here also the British made great innovations. Law in the East had meant as a rule a traditional custom, not easily altered; but under the British it became a rational system which was understood to be changeable to meet changing needs. Though in the law of marriage

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and succession the British conserved the old system—even perhaps interpreting it more rigidly than in the past—in the civil and criminal law they wrote new codes copied from western systems and with little regard to Indian traditions. These proved very strong engines for change. Law, which is the frame of a civilization, discourages certain institutions, encourages others. Thus the new law gave a new turn to Indian life, as for example by the type of economic life which it fostered. Maine remarked indeed that there was bitter complaint that life in India had become intolerable since the new criminal law had begun to treat women and children as if they were men.

A modern judiciary was organized. The law courts set up by the British have been much criticized—their chicanery, the opportunity which they have given to defeat substantial justice by technical adroitness, their impotence to check perjury, their remoteness from the people, their cost and their delays, their exaltation of a not very desirable legal caste, their absurd consequence that it has become a mark of social distinction to institute law suits. ‘Woe unto you, ye lawyers. For ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.’ Certainly, the peasantry, the largest class in India, seems to have been better served by the panchayats (where these existed) of pre-British times.<sup>1</sup> Yet in condemning the excesses of a rigid system and in compassion for a people over whom law has become a tyranny, let not the picture be forgotten of an earlier India where the royal officer or the grandee used without remonstrance whatever power he could muster against the unfortunate private citizen. As early as the seventeenth century the French traveller in India, Bernier, commenting on the absence of lawyers and law-suits in the India of Aurengzeb and on the supposed paradise which a European might suppose this to show, urged the critic to look at the other side of the picture—justice sold by the kazis to the rich, the poor man the victim without redress of whoever was powerful. In England itself there have always been complaints against lawyers such as are heard in India to-day—the Elizabethan playwrights, Webster and Tourneur, were especially angry—but history on balance has approved their contribution.

Besides the reforms of the law, the other achievement by the British, their second major set of creations in India, was the import, admittedly at a rather late stage of their rule, of the representative assembly, an institution hitherto unknown there, and indeed un-

<sup>1</sup> Burke once wrote: ‘People crushed by law have no hopes but from power. If laws are their enemies, they will be enemies to law.’

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known elsewhere in Asia. Treating India in the same way that they had treated the Anglo-Saxon parts of the Empire, though with misgivings and more tardily, the British from the late nineteenth century onwards set up representative assemblies for every unit of government; there were boards for the districts (whose population was usually between half a million and one million), municipalities for the cities, legislatures for the provinces, and a central legislature for the whole country. If at first the assemblies were consultative, it was recognized that in time there would be the demand that government should become responsible to them.

To serve these parliaments there came into existence the political parties. These, copied from the West, were a thing quite new in India, and indeed in oriental life. From early in the twentieth century, party was to dominate Indian politics, and was in the end to eclipse, as the centre of political power, the bureaucracy under whose aegis the parliaments had come into being. With party was born also the popular politician, who made his way by speech and debate, a being unknown in the time of Akbar or Asoka, or of Alahi Bhye and Jaswant Rao. The most active minds of the country discovered for the first time in India's history the fascination of politics as an occupation, and there began the obsession with them which the visitor to the country has ever since found so tedious.

Such were the changes in the apparatus of the State. Two innovations in the cultural life were no less important. One was the widespread use of the English language; the other the setting up of anglicized schools and universities. Of these the second had perhaps deeper consequences than the first.

The decision to make the English language the medium of higher education, taken under the influence of Macaulay, had, it is true, momentous results. But it was not for the reason usually supposed. The general view is that English, by uniting into a common class the educated classes from different parts of India whose vernaculars were unintelligible to each other, and by opening to them the modern ideas of the West, stimulated the rise of nationalism. That it made its growth easier, and accelerated it, cannot be denied. Yet nationalism would have developed in any event as the result of contact with the outside world. If English had not been the lingua franca, Urdu or a new form of Hindustani would have served, at least in the north, as they had done in the past. In time the Indian languages could have been modernized, as is happening to-day, to be a vehicle for the most up-to-date scientific teaching. The main importance, indeed, of the

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use of English by the educated class was different. It was to detach them curiously from the psychological life of their country. Since their thinking in matters of public affairs, modern commerce, and science was done in English, while their thinking on domestic matters was in the vernacular, the effect on the mind could not but be friction and instability. But as long as India remains a polyglot country, and a lingua franca is therefore essential, some part of the people will always be doomed to these disadvantages of bilingual life.

The change in the content of thinking came about not from the language but from the schools. Soon the sons of orthodox Hindu pandits, and a little later the sons of Moslem mullahs and Nawabs, were following the same curriculum as boys of the same generation in England. The sister of an early Victorian Governor-General gives a rather surrealist picture of a visit to one of the new schools.

'They asked the boys to give an account of the first Syracusan war, of the Greek schools and their founders, when the Septennial Bill was passed, what Pope thought of Dryden, what school of philosophy Trajan belonged to—in short dodged them about in this way—and they gave the most detailed and correct answers.'

Unhappily the universities became philistine and their prime function was to cram prospective clerks and civil servants with factual information. Nevertheless their larger and more liberal performance should not be underrated. Through them were planted in the minds of young Indians, at least in that part of their minds which engaged in public affairs, all the prejudices, axioms, and ideas of Victorian radicalism, and they became honorary Europeans. To-day most Indians are unaware how many of their fundamental ideas such as those of individualism, humanitarianism, and nationalism are borrowed and are not part of their own tradition. And indeed the British official responsibility for them was often slight, the British part being to hold open the Indian mouth, the progressive ideas from England and the rest of the world then flowing in; such a complacency by an authoritarian government to liberal influences was no less remarkable than was the insensitiveness which allowed India's own history and tradition to be neglected in the schools.

The education in the universities was spread widely. It was literary, not mechanical. The traditional prejudice against practical manual work was not overcome. Hence two consequences which were later to be weighty. On the one hand India, when it desired to modernize itself, was without an upper class with a mechanical turn of mind, skilled hands, and an instinct for undertaking great engineering



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works; on the other hand it possessed a class of literati much in excess of what it could suitably employ, and these were a potential army for any opposition to the government.

[ vi ]

With the framework of life transformed by these institutions and these ideas, Indian society began the changes which are still continuing and which have created so many problems of the present time. The new technical apparatus of life altered the material environment; railways increased the volume and velocity of circulation of the public; printing increased the volume of what it read; fashion changed, and western commodities and ways of life were imitated. The reflecting public absorbed western science, the artists tried to synthesize western painting and sculpture with their own tradition. Great cities formed the real centres of the new civilization and were magnets for the enterprising spirits from the villages; in them the ancient customs weighed a little less heavily; they were full of strange new buildings, the local version of European architecture.

Peace fostered trade, and the new law and European example caused a private enterprise such as would have been unthinkable under the regimes of the past; commercial and banking institutions grew up of the same pattern as in the West. Though at one time the policy of the government had scarcely favoured industrialization, factories began to appear first here, then there, until in the third decade of the twentieth century India became one of the leading industrial powers of the world. Trade unions struggled feebly to life.

New classes arose. The appearance of a middle class was especially momentous. This was recruited chiefly from sections of the community which formally had played a rather subordinate part in Indian life—in trade or in minor administration—but which, with the setting aside by the British of the military castes and the traditional leaders, came to the front. It established itself in the new-style commerce and professions. Some of the members of this class were almost grotesquely anglicized. One of the earliest glimpses of them is of a Prime Minister of a State at the end of the eighteenth century. 'Though a very learned shastri,' wrote a British envoy, 'he affects to be quite an Englishman, walks fast, talks fast, interrupts and contradicts, and calls the Peshwa and his ministers "old fools" or "damn rascals!"' The middle class acted as the main channel for the westernization of India. It was bound together and taught to act as a unit by the

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Press, whose establishment early in the nineteenth century was the real foundation of modern Indian politics. Among this class there developed a moral sense of civic duty, though this went side by side with the traditional instinct that a man's first duty was to his family; and in a conflict between the two duties the traditional obligation would prevail over the new and sophisticated one.

A social welfare movement developed on the same lines as in the West, and through private endeavour India became covered with widows' homes, girls' schools, asylums for the blind (to be in which was often perhaps a worse fate for the inmates than to be left to fend for themselves). There was agitation for improving the position of widows, abolishing purdah, raising the marriage age, forbidding polygamy, abolishing caste.

Yet this, it must not be forgotten, happened against a rural background in which pain, darkness, short life, labour and the pathos of puny effort against nature, were still the prime characteristics. Change affected chiefly the classes near the surface of Indian society; at the deep-sea levels the opaque colours of the past were little altered.

Such was the hotch-potch of actions, inhibitions and influences which determined the fate of India under the British. It was the play of a mildly liberal tendency of government and of the liberal forces of the time upon an oriental despotism. The receipt was to take the Moghul structure of administration—to use those parts which were convenient or promoted security—to make them function according to the hitherto unknown principle of the rule of law—to build on this, as a way of modernizing the country, what were regarded as the essential institutions of modern civilization, law courts, representative assemblies, a civil service, universities. The result was a palimpsest: the lower text was authoritarian, the upper was liberal. Or as Burke said at the trial of Warren Hastings, government was, or was intended to be, upon British principles but not by British forms.

Thereby the British might well have hoped to blend what was best in the western and Indian traditions. The peculiar achievement of India had been to evolve a society in which the contemplative life was the most revered; the peculiar strength of the British lay where India itself is weakest, in the flair for building political institutions. But, alas, the ancient mind of India, instead of deriving, as was once expected, new vitality from the new political institutions, began to wilt and disintegrate.

## CHAPTER FIVE



# MALAISE

[ i ]

**I**n spite of the domestic and foreign peace, so unfamiliar in India that it almost tingled in the ears, the people of the country, and especially the upper classes who alone at this stage influenced the course of politics, were in the judgment of nearly all visitors anything but happy. Material wants did not cause their misery but a disease of the spirit; and though it was intensified by, it was different from, the national pessimism which for two thousand years has sat like a cloud on the Indian mind.

It was not a unique disease; in other countries the same symptoms have shown themselves; but it is ironical that the closest parallel to the malady in India, in which a comparatively liberal though foreign system of government functioned, occurred in a country which is regarded now as a symbol of obscurantism, Russia of the Tsars. If this appears strange in British eyes, it is partly because in the legends which have grown up round the Russian revolution, the better qualities of the Tsarist monarchy have been forgotten. Certainly in some respects the circumstances of Russia in that period and India under the British are surprisingly close.

The cause of the malady in both countries was, broadly speaking, that an ancient social order was changed, and changed to a great extent by the action of government, but the reforming impulse of government petered out half-way, leaving the new classes sponsored by its activities disappointed and leaderless, and feeling the new world unsatisfactory.

In Russia the Tsardom had at first been the agent of a virtual revolution, or at least radical westernization, no less than were the British utilitarians and missionaries of the reforming period in India.

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Peter the Great imported western artisans. He started factories. He forced western manners and dress upon his capital. (This is a typical idiosyncrasy of oriental reformers; the Emperor Jehangir had planned to do the same in Moghul India, as did in our own day Mustapha Kamal in Turkey, and, to their cost, a Shah of Persia and a King of Afghanistan.) Later in the eighteenth century, when it seemed that the superiority of Europe to Russia lay not only in its technical apparatus but also in its culture, the zeal of government changed to promoting the spread of French language and French books.

Up to this stage the government outstripped all but its most eccentric subjects in its rage for modernization; but after the French Revolution the Russian aristocracy outstripped the monarchy. Westernization meant thereafter liberalism and the limitation of the power of the Tsar. The monarchy could scarcely be a champion of these ideals. Nevertheless, even after this change, the Tsardom did not become the dead weight on Russian progress which is sometimes popularly supposed. The freeing of the serfs in the middle of the nineteenth century by the Tsar Alexander II against the opposition of much of his own nobility; the reform under the same monarch of the judiciary in such a way that it became one of the least corrupt and also the humanest in Europe, the death penalty being very rare in the fifty years before the Bolshevik revolution; the government's economic policy, which was at least sufficiently well-conceived not to prevent Russian industry from developing rapidly, showed that the Tsardom had lost neither all its will nor all its beneficence. Finally, in politics, if the Tsars fought and tricked the Russian national parliament, the Duma, the government accepted in local affairs the representative assembly as the proper institution of administration. It set up the *zemstvos*, a sort of county council with fairly extensive franchise and with very wide powers in local administration; and the fact that these existed throughout almost all settled Russia meant that the concept of a land where popular activity could only be conspiratorial is a myth.

But while the Tsarist government continued thus to put out now and then a reforming measure, the most significant fact had ceased to be that the government was changing Russia, and was instead that the population itself, at least the upper sections of it, were becoming profoundly unhappy. What these classes had gone through—sprung for the most part from the general peasant mass of the population and compelled to live unfamiliarly and too hastily as nineteenth-century Europeans—is shown in the rather feverish nineteenth-century litera-

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ture of Russia. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, published in the middle of the century and analysing for the first time the new, disillusioned and frustrated type of young man, the nihilist, is in some ways the most illuminating document of nineteenth-century Russian history. The Russian educated classes were the most celebrated neurotics in Europe. Unforeseen and uncontrollable, a *malaise* had come upon society, poisoning all its actions.

The *malaise* caused a schism between the Russian government and people. How a regime keeps a contact with the people, how it loses it—this is one of the mysteries of politics. A government reasonably competent and humane may forfeit almost totally the allegiance of the energetic people in the community, especially if it loses a clear purposive activity and ceases to enlist for itself the hopes of the ardent and aspiring. In its last twenty years the Tsardom became a symbol of constraint and repression. A mediocre Tsar, a series of bad appointments to ministerial office, an unsuccessful war, a creeping sense among those who by nature and interest should have been the supporters of government that all was rotten and ended—these finally destroyed what had seemed the most impressive autocracy of modern history. Its decline from an eminence which awed Europe to complete squalid collapse was as rapid as the fall of Eastern monarchies of antiquity. The classes which overthrew it were those which its own modernizing policies had engendered; so Jupiter, escaping the voracious appetite of Saturn, had set aside his creator.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One cause of the *malaise* was that the Tsarist government was a bureaucratic government in its extreme form, always galling to the human spirit. Here is a picture of the Tsarist bureaucracy by the liberal critic, Alexander Herzen, who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century: 'One of the saddest consequences of the revolution effected by Peter the Great is the development of the official class in Russia. These officials are an artificial, ill-educated, and hungry class, incapable of anything except office work, and ignorant of everything except official papers. They form a kind of lay clergy, officiating in the law courts and police offices, and sucking the blood of the nation with thousands of dirty, greedy mouths. . . . In those grimy offices which we walk through as fast as we can, men in shabby coats sit and write; first they write a rough draft and then copy it out on stamped paper—and individuals, families, whole villages are injured, terrified, ruined. The father is banished to a distance, the mother is sent to prison, the son to the Army; it all comes upon them as suddenly as a thunder-clap, and in most cases it is undeserved. The object of it all is money. Pay up! . . . Then there are the police and law officers—they must live somehow, and one has a wife to maintain and another a family to educate, and they are all model fathers and husbands.' The Tsarist bureaucracy depended far less on terror than the Soviet Government which succeeded it. Tsarist Russia indeed seethed with discussion and debate. And it is curious that a mild absolutism seems to produce a *malaise* much stronger than a thorough-paced one, perhaps because under a real tyranny which does not shrink from violence the fear which it causes eclipses resentment.

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The intelligentsia were not only against the government, but a vigorous section, the Slavophiles, whose groans were heard throughout the Continent, denounced all the western civilization which two centuries of Tsardom had thrust on them. They were at once reactionaries and revolutionaries, prophets of doom.

### [ ii ]

The visitor to India in the later years of the British Raj felt at times that among the upper classes he was surrounded by people who talked and acted very much like those of the novels of Tchekov and Dostoievsky. Their history had, in fact, been similar. They, too, were the progeny of a reforming government, for, cautious and vacillating as it was, the early administration in India had been a modernizing force, as we saw in the previous chapter. They, too, had to ape an unfamiliar life, that of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europeans. They, too, found the government, their creator, growing remote from them and suspicious of them; one of the shortcomings of the British administrator in India was his embarrassed aloofness from the Indian educated classes.

The severity of the strain which had been put on the Indian mind, indeed on the mind of all Asia which had come under western influence, must be appreciated if modern Asiatic history is to be understood. For countless generations Indians, whether Hindu or Moslem, had had before them an interpretation of human life and of nature, incorrect perhaps but intelligible and forming a whole. Life was full of certainties, most of them connected with religion; almost everything in man's existence fell into place. But what had European civilization to offer to the East? A restless curiosity, a method of scientific inquiry, a vast mass of certain new facts about the material universe, new aims of political life—all, indeed of value, but, as it has often been pointed out, the defect of the modern Western outlook is that all its many values are separate from one another. There is no longer a comprehensive pattern or picture of the nature of the world and of the nature of man such as is found in other civilizations or existed earlier in Europe. Thus, in receiving the riches of the West, the Indian surrendered what had been the chief fortifying asset of his life, his former clear-cut picture of why the universe existed and what was his role in it. The peculiar Hindu philosophy had not, it is true, been upset by western science, for most of its beliefs were not incompatible with modern scientific teaching; but science, without disproving the

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Hindu religion, drove it into the background, Life lost its old pattern and the new one was confused and constantly changing.

What galled India also under the new system was a sense of aimless drift. It is the nature of a more or less liberal administration such as had been set up by the British to avoid the paternal control of the minds of its subjects, and thus the new classes were left with their feet unsupported and their hands unheld to find their way in a changing world. In general, people are happiest when they believe that they are performing work under superior direction and approval. But one of the worst features of life in British India was that nobody seemed to be under moral compulsion to follow any particular line, and, except so far as the old Hindu caste ideas persisted, there was no longer any religious or moral sanction behind men's lives. Nothing mattered very much. The incentive to action was self-interest. After a time, this palled.

Moreover, the western habits of mind came to India too often in their baser forms—in vulgarity, in the acceptance of ready-made notions and sentiments, and in violence of opinion. The atmosphere was philistine; and the typical figure of the times was the half-hearted go-getter—go-getter because there was nothing about which to be idealistic; half-hearted because there is something incompatible between the Indian temperament and ruthless enterprise.

Full of qualms, anxious to shine at the new game he was called on to play but mistrusting his skill, the educated Indian was apt, like the pre-revolutionary Russian, to round in peevish despair on the society which had produced him. Modern Indian man had been made by a mighty machine, but its creatures, disliking what they were, slashed at it with whatever hammers they could find. Their self-respect was fatally wounded. Some sought to restore it by reverting to the ancient ideas and institutions, which were painted with a false glory, but in their hearts most knew the folly of doing this, and their deepest feeling was a kind of death-wish.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a certain truth in the rather frivolous picture of the traditional type of Hindu given by Mr. Norman Douglas. 'Hindus are not afflicted with the fidgets. . . . They do not imagine, like Europeans, that they are driving a machine because they happen to be tangled up in its works. It does one good to watch them sitting on the grass in merry groups under their apricots and walnuts, laughing and chatting and playing games and nibbling from time to time at a fresh lettuce leaf—local substitute for a glass of beer.' But a heavy change has now come over them, or at least over those caught in the machinery of the modern world. It might be argued that the worst disservice of the British to India was that under their rule the Indian educated class began to suffer the same atrophy or frustration of the emotional life as is alleged for some generations to have afflicted the British.

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[ iii ]

This Indian nihilism was aggravated, as in Russia, by the sense of political frustration. It is a healthy instinct among a class which has attained any position in society to desire a political career. If this instinct is frustrated, the class turns sour, and if it is large enough infects with its rampaging sense of injustice all the rest of society. The British gave, under the rule of law, liberty from arbitrary acts of government, but were much slower to give the rather different liberty of controlling the acts of government. Until near the end of the British Raj the government was a bureaucracy, causing the cynicism which such a system always seems to occasion; it used to be described as a despotism of despatch-boxes tempered by the loss of keys. The great majority of Indians never saw the British officials, and for them the government consisted of petty Indian clerks, procrastinating and often corrupt. The visitor to India, meeting the English civil servants, often did not observe what a morass there lay beneath them of chicanery, petty oppression, obstruction and incompetence.

While the British eventually created the parliaments as a stage for the energies and passions of the political parties, they acted too late to prevent the growth of an aggrieved spirit, suspicious, insatiable, inappeasable.

Whether they could, in fact, have conceded power more rapidly without causing a breakdown of government is one of the questions which will be discussed as long as interest in these times continues. But under an authoritarian system, the British, though humane, were forced like traditional Indian governments to use from time to time repressive measures. What other course was open? To capitulate to immature parties whose ability to sustain the weight of government was at least very uncertain. Thus politics developed under the gloomy and poisoning, though intermittent, shadow of the police, censorship and the prison. Jawarharlal Nehru has described in moving words how the main emotion in the land was fear, and if to the impartial onlooker the fear seemed often unfounded and also to be less widespread than under previous Indian governments, the fact of fear was none the less unpleasant. Whatever may have been the reality, Indians believed themselves to be in chains. Whether or not there was in fact an active political police, they believed themselves spied upon.<sup>1</sup> And like the Tsarist government, the British government thwarted

<sup>1</sup> In 1943, an Indian police officer, on being told that there were Socialist members of the British Cabinet, replied, 'Ah, but they are watched!'



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liberty just enough to kindle resentment, not enough to kill that resentment by fear.

The Indian discontent was even sharper than the Russian because of the aggravation of being a conquered country. British government, it is true, was by no means oppressive. It has been the thesis of this book that as the home government in Great Britain was unwilling to maintain the British position in India over the long run by force, it was necessary for the British to secure their position by gaining the consent of the governed, and in this they succeeded, on the whole, for a long time. Nevertheless they were aliens; and alien government always harms the spirit of a country. India, which supplies so many examples of political behaviour, supplied an almost perfect instance of the tension of a people feeling themselves under subjection. They could not hold up their heads among the free peoples of the world. They had not their own flags or national symbols which abroad they saw increasingly worshipped. The educated people were like a hedgehog with its bristles permanently extended. From the essays of Macaulay, who was held up to them as a model philosopher and statesman, they learned that the British Empire in India was made by fraud and violence. No foreign government could supply them with a cause for which to sacrifice themselves. They believed, genuinely, that owing to their impotence irreparable harm was being done to their society by the foreign hand, its growth being either distorted or arrested. Not unnaturally they resented the contempt which many British officers showed for Indian institutions and ways of life, especially in the middle and late periods of British rule, even though they may privately through their own westernization have come to share this contempt. Also they had much to endure in more straightforward insult. Temperamentally, Indians are sensitive and sympathetic and respond to these qualities in other people, and nearly every Indian at some time or other met with some snub or rudeness from an Englishman and, without the opportunity to retaliate, suffered because of the political situation a wound which festered. As a consequence, Indians developed an almost unbelievable capacity for detecting insult and intrigue in quarters where none was intended. They did not realize that Englishmen were often quite as rude to one another as to Indians; a century ago the Duke of Wellington remarked that there was not a single good-tempered Englishman in all India.

There was another curious psychological effect. The discouraged young Indian blamed on the British the shortcomings of the national

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life. Reflecting on how much better he would be if the British were away he was able to excuse himself all effort for the present. This may seem a travesty, but some Christian missionaries have declared that in this effect of British rule lay the most important argument for its termination. By attracting all criticism to themselves the British robbed India of the power of self-criticism.

It is hard to exaggerate the extent to which most of what happened in Indian politics in the two or three decades before Indian independence was the result of these neuroses. There was the bitter sense that society, constituted as it was, obstructed and frustrated right living. When a feeling of this kind emerges, and anger accumulates behind it, an existing government is doomed, however tough its carapace, however humane its intentions, however brilliant its trappings. It may perhaps therefore be permissible to supplement this account of the nature of the neurosis by a study of how it manifested itself class by class.

### [ iv ]

There is a pathos in the very size of the Indian population and in the sense of the stunted lives, limited aims and unworthy hates of so many human beings, victims not only of the present but of a long past. Out of the mass the individual as in all countries tried to elevate himself and live with freedom and dignity; but in India the effort is harder than in most societies, the pressure of adverse circumstances stronger, and the individual is more the victim of convention and compulsion. Consider what in concrete terms was the life during the last generation or two of the British Raj of some of the principal classes of the community.

The mass of the people, the peasantry, still followed a life not very different from that of any time in the past two thousand years; gaining a little in safety, they had lost a little because of the disintegration of village life through the decay of the panchayats, but they felt probably no greater unhappiness than in the past. Only in the most recent years had the general restlessness begun to stir them, carried by the itinerant agitator, the newspaper, the motor bus which has brought them into the orbit of the towns, and the economic upheaval of the recent war. But it was still by no means rare to find a peasant who had never heard of great contemporary events or even of Mr. Gandhi.

The town proletariat, a new creation, lived in ways which would horrify the western world. The great industrial cities, such as Ahmad-

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abad and Cawnpore, were a nightmare of hovels of corrugated iron and sacking, of streets which ended suddenly in backyards, stinking puddles, wandering and famished cows, garbage, and the scream of factory sirens—sights such as are described by Disraeli in *Sybil* of the industrial north in England and are to-day regarded as impossible exaggerations. But as the proletariat was partly recruited from the untouchables who for centuries have been forced to skulk on the outskirts of their villages, urban life still seemed preferable, especially if its horrors were diversified by excitements which break monotony, and also because it was a window on a happier future.

The upper classes had all endured distress of some kind. The landowning class, partly the descendants of magnates of pre-British days, partly a new creation, had the stimulus neither of danger nor responsibility; they neglected their estates and went to live in the towns, where they engendered a peculiar version of the Victorian civilization of the antimacassar, the sporting picture, the stag antlers, the billiard-room and the coloured glass candelabra, of the family photograph album and the prints of royal personages. Asia has a strange flair for mimicking the most grotesque side of the West. There was a lack of uniformity and an exuberant growth of eccentric individual personality, as there always is among classes rich, leisured, denied participation in government, and bored. They were spoilt for India by European prejudices and for Europe by Indian habits. They were often men of considerable mental development and culture; but they had nothing to do.

The merchants, lawyers and industrialists were busy and successful, but as only a part of the faculties of their minds were habitually employed, they were not a type of which India could be especially proud.<sup>1</sup>

The educated clerical class had the most unenviable place; and with the setting aside by the British of the former leaders of the people, it was this class which was to step into their place and lead the new political movements.<sup>2</sup> Consider its history. As has been often noticed, the intelligentsia came into being not because it was attracted to Euro-

<sup>1</sup> How anglicized were these classes is shown rather vividly in the following remark by Matthew Arnold on England of the nineteenth century which would be true of India to-day. 'The graver self of the Barbarian (the aristocracy) likes honours and consideration; his more relaxed self, field sports and pleasure. The graver self of the Philistine (middle class) likes fanaticism, business and money-making; his more relaxed self, comfort and tea-meetings.'

<sup>2</sup> From this class came all the leaders of the masses. In India the masses have as yet produced few leaders of their own class. Such organizations as they have—trade unions, peasant unions—have been made for them by the educated class.

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pean civilization by pure intellectual curiosity, but by the lust for employment. It was highly overproduced. In government reports, there were repeatedly accounts of the alarming number of applications from university graduates for every government post falling vacant, however low the salary. The majority of the class made its living by drudgery, and its temper was frayed by want and confusion and by the nagging and goading of the excess of relations who inhabit every Indian house. The young man of this class believed vaguely that science or the turn of history had disproved many of the traditional ideas.<sup>1</sup> He sought therefore to build himself a new personality suited to the new world which he had to handle. The new personality was usually aggressive—because the young man felt insecure. It worshipped force—because by a kind of sympathetic magic this made the young man feel himself forceful. It cut adrift from the old established institutions—and he felt guilt in consequence. It criticized and back-bit—because he had no clear conception of any desirable goal. The young man was unhappy, arid, and a gossip. Partly because English was the language he naturally used, he felt himself cut off from the past. He was a new type in the East, the pathological egoist who had lost his roots in society. He wished for change, and was willing to flee ten thousand miles from that which the tourist goes ten thousand miles to see, the pageantry of sadhus, burning ghats, holy rivers, kirtan parties, durbars, and all the concomitant sounds and scents which render India unique. At least he was an improvement on the past in that, instead of withdrawing from the world, he sought, though often with an incapacitating petulance, to grapple with it. He was a an imitation European, but lacked the invisible foundation of experience and habit on which the European stands.

<sup>1</sup> The extent to which young India has become materialist can, of course, be exaggerated. There still lingers an interest in the culture of the soul which in the West might be regarded as unusual. In the recent disturbances, Congressmen imprisoned for violence spent much of the time studying the Vedanta.

## CHAPTER SIX



# NATIONALISM

[ i ]

As the *malaise* of the Russian upper classes overthrew the Tsarist regime, once very formidable, so in India the unhappiness of the educated classes had sapped the political structure built by the British. The means by which this has happened was the nationalist movement, which satisfied in India the same psychological needs as liberalism and socialism had done in Russia. Nationalism restored the self-respect of the new classes and offered them a purpose—it was like a band marching down a street behind which those who had been idling could fall in. How intoxicating was the idea of the ‘nation’ to young men when it was a quite new discovery and they were chafing at parochial life, we, living in the shadow of war caused by the hypertrophy of nationalism, can hardly now realize. The desire to feel society functioning as in some way a unity, and the desire to feel oneself a part of this organism, is the basis of nationalism and is not to be condemned. Nationalism touched the whole life of the country and there was a revival of interest in Indian art and philosophy; but, essentially, nationalism meant politics.

Nationalism rose partly from resentment at foreign rule, and partly reflected the world-wide political life of the times. In its service there grew, as in other countries, a new, romantic, and not very correct picture of the country’s past.

It had been the absence of nationalism which had made possible the British conquest of India; in its initial conquest in Bengal the East India Company had been egged on by the rich Indian merchants with whom it was in a kind of partnership. To an empire formed, as was the British one, the rise of nationalism was a doom which it

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could not in the long run withstand. The British Raj could be maintained only as long as the nationalist movement could be held in check by an administration using primarily Indian force to restrain it, and that without such repression as would stir the liberal conscience of England to effective protest. All the early administrators of the Raj knew this. They regarded the Raj as more or less accidental, doomed to pass as soon as Indian society had gone through its revolution of modernizing itself and classes rose which could claim back its government. Many had the belief that it was Britain's mission to train India for self-government as rapidly as might be.<sup>1</sup> Only during the latter half of the nineteenth century did this clear and modest understanding pass and it began to seem for a time that the subjection of India would be lasting. And even then such sagacious writers as Seeley pointed out that India could never be held except by consent, and that if either the Indian army or Indian bureaucracy ceased to serve the British Raj willingly the British would have no alternative but to quit.

[ ii ]

The end came more or less as it had been forecast. It is true that nationalism developed slowly; the most intelligent observers forty years ago testified to the continuing weakness and superficiality of the movement. Indeed at its start it had actually been patronized for a short time by the government; and a nationalist poet wrote a poem describing how Bharatavarshini, goddess of the Indian earth, had fled because of the evil-doings and discord of her children, and how the English by providential decree had been sent to regenerate the land, and eventually to restore the goddess to her throne. It is true, too, that some Indians long after those days of relative good will continued to support the government through thick and thin, even against their own national leaders such as Mr. Gandhi, so strong was the prestige which government enjoys in India by the mere fact that it is government.

—Partly the nationalist movement operated through political parties

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Elphinstone, one of the great architects of the Empire, wrote: 'The most desirable course for events to take in India is that European opinions and knowledge should spread until the nation becomes capable of founding a government of its own on principles of which Europe has long had the exclusive possession. A history of little other merit which shall preserve the otherwise perishable record of that progress will be read with the deepest interest in India and with attention elsewhere.'

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and agitation in a manner copied exactly from the West. Partly, like nationalism generally, it looked back to the past. At the start it was chiefly a Hindu movement. Not only the election meeting, the ballot box, the resolution, the reasoned pamphlet, made the atmosphere of the movement, but also a religious emotion roused rather by the ancient Hindu mysteries than by John Stuart Mill on Liberty. At a later stage Mr. Gandhi owed part of his strength to the fact that he was revered by some as an avatar or incarnation of the great Hindu gods.

People were afire with the urge to do something, though what it should be they did not always know. The skill of the succession of leaders of the nationalist parties—Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru—was to crystallize what all, or large sections, had vaguely felt—to speak their subconscious mind—so that these, seeing what had perplexed them now simplified and made clear, joined together for action, and by their support heaved the leaders to power.

As in the growth of liberty in England, lawyers played a major role. This was natural since, with the rule of law, Indian life under the British has been dominated by legal concepts. Because of the cult of the law, agitators to a surprising extent avoided violent acts and sought reform by legal means; though there were certainly also times when the terrorist was in the ascendant, and Hindu nationalism has sometimes been associated with the worship of Kali, the goddess of destruction.

Nationalism united the most diverse interests, reactionary, progressive and plain anarchist, millionaire and pauper, Hindu and Moslem. Between them there was no agreement on what was to replace the existing order: the only bond of union was *malaise* and the will to end the British regime.

The movement gathered force. It became formidable first in the early years of the present century. The classes which were politically active slowly withdrew their support from the British regime; and a government in its top levels the least corrupt, most competent and humanest in Asia, and one in which the overwhelming mass of government servants were native Indians and not aliens, sank gradually in the eyes of its educated subjects until it seemed an ogre, a foreign monster, something under which they could hardly breathe. It had exhausted its mandate; the symbolism of state with which it was associated lost its force; and the symbols which stirred the imagination of the country became instead those of the new political parties which the nationalist movement had brought to life.

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If, as it had been suggested, the caduceus of Mercury is the emblem of a sound government—a rod surmounted by wings and entwined by serpents—it must be said that the British government of India had lost its wings; its serpents were not particularly subtle; only the rod remained, and that could be used only sparingly.

Every few years there was a conflict between the nationalist parties, with all to win from aggression, and the British, anxious above all to escape the criticism that they were governing by force, which it became increasingly difficult to do. It is true that the majority of the people continued uninterested in politics, as under all previous regimes in India, and the government could justifiably say that the protest against its rule came from what was numerically a small minority. In general, the mass wanted only a quiet life. Yet enough of the people were willing to follow leaders of revolt to make it impossible to carry on government without occasional abrogation of civil liberties and stern repressions. Each conflict ended with a technical victory for the British, and an increasing certainty in India and Britain alike that the British day in India was ending. Such was the history of the nationalist upheavals of 1919, 1931 and 1942. From the time when rich Hindu nationalists gained such ascendancy that the government shrank from policies of social or economic reform likely to offend them, the British Raj really ended. As one by one the classes which had supported the government transferred their attachment to the political parties, the British found themselves like generals whose armies had vanished away like Sennacherib's and who had no alternative but to come to terms with their adversaries. Indeed, true to their plan of staying only with Indian consent, they had made no real attempt to fight back, never, for example (or hardly ever) conducting an anti-nationalist propaganda. The Empire which had come in like a lion which was rather surprised at its power went out like a lamb. Civil servants became aware that they were, as one of their present generation termed them, 'Strangers in India'; and to recognize this was more than half-way to abdicating. The British had made parliamentary self-government the goal of their policy, and their only difference with the nationalists was over the speed of progress. The outward expression of their policy was the reforms of 1919 and 1935, the abortive proposals of the war years, the proposals of the Cabinet Mission of 1946, the declaration in 1947 of the resolve to quit, and the final act of departure.

The success of the nationalists would have come earlier if the nationalist movement had remained united. But as it surged, it di-



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vided into Hindu nationalism and Moslem nationalism. The Hindus stood for a strong executive; the Moslems at first for a federal government guaranteeing their local autonomy, and later for the independent state of Pakistan. Here was the old bane of Indian society, its divisiveness, showing itself once again. The two nationalisms struggled with each other for the power which the British were laying down, and thus delayed the triumph of either. Constitutional advance was also delayed by the need to fit the Princes into the new structure. Nothing would convince the Indian nationalist that these divisions were not fomented and manipulated by British officials in their struggle to maintain their authority.

### [ iii ]

How the Indian upper classes resembled the Russian has been already described. The parallel of the last days of the British Raj, described above, and of the Tsarist Empire has also been so close that it may be interesting to notice some of the details.

The Indian central parliament and the Russian Duma; the Indian provincial governments and the Russian zemstvos; the Indian liberals and the Russian liberals; the Congress and the Cadets; the autocracy of the Viceroy and the autocracy of the Tsar; the inordinate influence which unqualified persons could often obtain over the highest decisions; the use of a police force which, however well controlled, was nevertheless felt by the country to be a social outlaw—all along the line there are similarities. The Russian autocracy was spasmodically liberal; so was the Indian. Tsarism disliked the educated classes and placed its confidence, blindly as it proved, in the loyalty of the peasants; so did many British officers. St. Petersburg was obsessed with terrorism; so was Delhi. In the last years before the war of 1914 the efforts of the enlightened friends of the Tsardom were to buttress it with a 'ministry of confidence'; and similar efforts were made by the government of India during the recent war. In 1905 the Tsarist government, in the middle of war with Japan, was faced with domestic insurrection, the result of military reverses, the agitation of revolutionary parties and economic distress; but the government, though threatened for a few days, did not fall because the army and the police remained loyal, which they failed to do when the revolution took place in 1917. Those who were in Delhi in 1942 must have felt that the political events then were uncomfortably like those which took place in Russia in 1905; and they knew, too, that liberal circles

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abroad, especially in America, looked forward to the dissolution of the Indian Empire as a hope for human advance, just as liberals in England had wished for the destruction of the Russian Tsardom.

### [ iv ]

It is easy to deplore the end of British rule in India, to admire the profound peace which was being jeopardized, to correct some of the undervaluing of the achievements of the British government, to recollect that the end of the Roman Empire was followed by a Dark Age and that the end of British rule in Asia might have the same result, to insist that it was the possession of certain territories imperialistically gained which enabled Great Britain to check Germany in the first stages of the late war, and thereby, as it may fairly be claimed, to save liberal civilization. But the conclusion is not that because of these considerations the British control of India should have been maintained indefinitely even against the will of the awakened section of the Indian people. For the pride of the British has been to insist on government by consent. Whoever has seen in action government by force—a sullen people, the fear of police, the periodical brutal tumult in the streets, with arson and looting put down by whips and guns—will applaud the British tradition that a magistrate who uses force by that very fact loses face. Other things being equal, civil means should, except in rare moments of emergency, be sufficient to circumvent violence. The British public would not sanction the persistent use of force against a resolute opposition. It could do so only by changing its nature.<sup>1</sup>

British rule had rested on prestige rather than force. Congress, noting this, had concentrated on undermining the prestige by agitation. That is the truth of saying that Congress talked the British out of India.

The pathological emotionalism which was India's disease during this century, whose poison was sensed in the air by every visitor to the country, and which frustrated all reasonable life, could be allayed by nothing except a yielding to the nationalist demand. The British had to go, even if going had meant disaster to India.

<sup>1</sup> The Irish understood this. An Indian writer told me that, wishing to write the life of W. B. Yeats, he visited the poet who said to him: 'Why waste time in such frivolities? You should be making bombs,' and gave him a letter of introduction to an Irish Republican.

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[ v ]

Both nationalist government in India and Bolshevik government in Russia were brought in through the *malaise* of the educated classes of the countries. The Russians banished this *malaise* by partly exterminating the classes which had been the worst sufferers, and by giving the survivors tasks which satisfied their imagination or by laying such burdens upon them that their work was fully cut out in enduring, so that they had no time to mope. Will the new Indian governments, whose ideas are at present not at all like those of the Bolsheviks, succeed in rebuilding society in such a way that they soothe and melt the discontent of the upper and middle classes which has been such a force of destruction and change? Revolution is hardly likely to be at an end until the Indian mind, perhaps after many vicissitudes, loses its present patchwork quality and achieves again unity and peace.

## CHAPTER SEVEN



# TRADITIONAL BURMA

[ i ]

Besides demolishing and rebuilding the central fabric of South Asia, the Indian civilization, the British did not spare the lesser structures. These, though for world history so much less important than India, were also ancient works of time, often intricate and attractive. Of these lesser civilizations the principal one affected was the Burmese.

The Burmans, in total number always a small people, indeed a minute fraction of the Indian population, are a mixed race whose origin is a matter of controversy, but was distinct from that of the Indian peoples. While their civilization made large borrowings from India their spirit remained their own. Strong Burmese kingdoms existed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, in the sixteenth century, and again from the early eighteenth century to the conquest by the British. For short periods they terrorized the neighbouring lands of Siam and Bengal; once they even fought the Chinese with success. In the times when a central Burmese government was in abeyance the country was divided between the Burmans and the neighbouring Shan peoples, and also the Mons or Talaings whom the Burmans eventually absorbed.

The following very brief account of what was the Burmese civilization before the British transformed it cannot do justice to the charm which most sensitive visitors have recorded of this rather singular country.

[ ii ]

Burmese civilization, even more perhaps than the Indian, is the product of its religion. This is Buddhism. For many centuries there

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have been two principal schools of Buddhism. Both began in India (though Buddhism afterwards died out there while it spread eastwards) and were offshoots of Hinduism. The type of Buddhism found in Burma differs from Hinduism in that it concentrates less on metaphysics than on a psychological fact—that all men are miserable—while Hinduism has its eyes turned less on the unhappiness of individual man than on the majesty of the universe as a whole.

Buddhism springs out of a pessimistic analysis of human experience. This pessimism has been common to all Asia, and indeed to Europe itself except in the last two centuries. And to-day in Europe as the result of two wars there has arisen the fashionable modern philosophy of Existentialism, which bases its system on human anguish as the principal observable fact of experience, and is thus no less gloomy in outlook than was the ancient world in which Buddha lived. Buddhism teaches that all conscious life can be analysed into three parts, desire, the satisfaction of desire, and disillusion when desire is satisfied. Life is a progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment. Nor is death the end of disillusionment, for Buddhism took over from Hinduism the doctrine of reincarnation and eternal rebirth.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of Buddhism is to teach a way of release from misery which can be practised by the ordinary man and is not dependent on divine grace. This is the simple remedy of suspending desire. The man who succeeds in this becomes immune from all unhappiness: himself a Buddha, he has achieved positive happiness. In his final state of perfection he enters into Nirvana and is exempt from rebirth.

Nirvana is described in negative terms, and there is some disagreement about its meaning. Some think of it as total loss of personality and absorption in the divine, others as a blissful unchanging state of personal existence. The belief that Nirvana means total extinction seems to be a misunderstanding.<sup>2</sup>

Salvation of the soul may take a very long time and involve countless reincarnations both in animal and human form. A Buddhist monk in Siam calculated as follows: 'In order to estimate the ages needful for all the transmigrations which are preliminary to the creation of a Buddha, you are to fancy a granite block of enormous

<sup>1</sup> In its strictest form, Hinayana Buddhism denies the existence of the soul, resolving it into a stream of sense data. But this denial is hard to reconcile with the belief in reincarnation. Some Hinayana Buddhists have even regarded the existence of God as an open question.

<sup>2</sup> It might be interesting to compare the concept of the 'Null' of the Existentialist philosophers with the Nirvana of the Buddhists.

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extent which is to be visited once every hundred thousand years by a celestial spirit clad in light muslin robes, which should just touch the rock in flitting by; and that until by the touch of the garment, which must remove an infinitesimal and invisible fragment of the stone, the whole stone should be reduced in successive visitations to the size of a grain of sand, the period of transmigrations of a Buddha would not be completed. Again, there is no spot on earth or ocean which you can touch where a Buddha has not been buried in some form or other during the incalculable period of his transitions from one to another mode of existence.'

All teaching is summed up in four simple propositions which are the centre of the Buddhist mind and use, called the four noble truths; these form a coherent and easily intelligible view of the world and the proper course of man in it. They are as follows. All life is suffering; life is the result of desire; cessation of desire ends life and suffering; the cessation of desire is attained by the eight-fold path. The eight-fold path has been described as the ladder of the mystical life; it is to believe rightly, aspire rightly, speak rightly, act rightly (that is, according to the accepted moral law), follow an honest livelihood, sustain a constant mental exertion, to be alert, and to be serene. Stealing, deceiving, adultery, killing, and the drinking of intoxicants are the principal crimes.

Buddhism has usually impressed visitors from the West more favourably than Hinduism. Marco Polo, who visited Burma, remarked that if only it had come from God it would be the best religion in the world.

### [ iii ]

Buddhism has pervaded Burma so thoroughly because it has for centuries been served by an order of devotees. These are called pongyis—the name means Great Glory. It is not easy to decide what is the status of the pongyi in western terms. Sometimes it has been said that pongyis are not priests, since they do not administer any sacraments like the Christian clergy. But they satisfy most of the other traditional requirements of a priesthood; they are celibate; they preach; they pray at weddings and funerals; they stand on a pedestal in comparison with the laity. The pongyis renounced the world, but they did not, like some of the Indian mystics, live in isolated retirement, for Buddhism was a revolutionary religion in that it had a missionary spirit. The duty of the pongyis was to preach its gospel and redeem their fellow men.

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At times the standards of the pongyis sank low. For example, in the eleventh century a sect called the Ari in Upper Burma was noted for haughtiness and high living; it was complained that they bred racehorses, boxed, and wore long hair. Such aberrations were, however, rare. During most of Burmese history the clergy were, if not very learned, at least surprisingly unworldly. Dressed in yellow robes, gliding with begging bowl amiably round the village, the pet of its women (as were the holy men in Holy Russia) vaguely saintly or frankly cheerful and fat—a kind of Buddhist Friar Tuck—the monk is among the things which for centuries have given the Burmese countryside its character. The monks were at once the village gossips, the source (though often themselves only vaguely informed) of the knowledge of Buddha's teaching, the moral censors, and, if holy, the pride of the community. In each village of any consequence there is a monastery, built on the outskirts and among trees, housing perhaps only three or four monks, but the centre of the village life.

Traditional casuistry enabled the monks to observe the Buddhist rule without living in intolerable austerity. The rules are comprehensive. In a Siamese version which was the same as the Burmese they included:

Kill no human being.

Steal not.

When you eat, make no noise like dogs, chibi, chibi, chiabi, chiabi.

To cough or sneeze, in order to win the notice of a group of girls, seated, is a sin.

Boast not of your own sanctity.

Destroy no tree.

Give no flowers to women.

Wink not in speaking.

To sit on the same mat with a woman is a sin.

To wear shoes which hide the toes is a sin.

It is a sin not to love every one alike.

It is a sin in laughing to raise the voice.

To clean the teeth while speaking to others is a sin.

A monk who whistles for his amusement sins.

A monk sins who in eating slobbers his mouth like a little child.

A monk may not wash himself in the twilight or in the dusk, lest he should inadvertently kill some insect or other living thing.

The hold of the monks on the country came partly from their being schoolmasters. They provided Burma with an educational system

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which in Asia was equalled only by, if it did not surpass, that of ancient China. Moreover the profession of the monk was so much respected that every man of the entire population at some period of his life served a novitiate in a monastery, the period of which might sometimes be only a symbolical day or two but was often much longer. And this was not regarded as a burdensome obligation but as an honour which a boy was unwilling to forgo. The day on which he was initiated was often the most memorable of his life. Dressed as a prince (because Buddha had been a prince) he rode in state to the monastery, there (like Buddha) to lay aside his crown, take the tonsure, and don the robe. It was a sign that he had come to manhood. As a result, nobody in Burma was without knowledge of the interior of the monastery, few were indifferent to the peace which reigned there, and nearly all had accompanied the monks on their daily begging tour.

The army of monks thus acted as a kind of occupying and garrisoning force keeping Burma secure for Buddhism; but, as in all countries where a higher religion has vanquished older forest or jungle religion, there existed older gods which, though much dwindled, received from Buddhism an amiable tolerance. These were the spirits of nature, or Nats, like the fairies or trolls of Europe. 'Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth.' Trees had Nats, rivers had Nats, Nats played all kinds of tricks on humanity if not appeased. A spirit much feared was one which was twenty-five feet high, whistling, and always hungry because its mouth was only as large as the eye of a needle. Midway between these beliefs and pure Buddhism was the tendency to treat Buddha himself not as a venerable teacher but as a divinity who must be placated and sacrificed to.

[ iv ]

A people with a religion whose fundamental tenet was that no satisfaction was to be found in the world might have been expected to be sombre and listless. Burmans on the contrary were among the most light-hearted people in the world, and as their national temperament has affected their history, these psychological facts are of importance. All the Indonesian peoples share indeed in some measure the engaging traits of gaiety and unusual kindness. A pleasant Burmese custom was to purchase the catch of a fisherman and restore it to life and liberty in the river; one of the deepest Buddhist hells was kept for hunters; Burmans say, quite truly, that famine such as has



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made India too often a nightmare could not happen in Burma since each man would share even his remnant with his neighbour. It is true that there are wicked Burmans, and that even the best are sometimes surprisingly cruel, but this comes from a high-strung temperament rather than settled malevolence.

One of the early British administrators gave the following sympathetic picture of the life of the Burmese peasant. 'In the morning, after his bath, he lazes about, talking to the neighbours till breakfast time, or perhaps strolls out to the corner of his paddy field, and indulges in a contemplative smoke. After breakfast he probably dozes through the heat of the day, and when the shadows begin to get long, saunters about again. . . . The evenings are spent ordinarily in amicable converse over a cheroot at a friend's house in the rains. Variety comes occasionally in the shape of a jolting, hilarious journey to a distant pagoda feast, or a trip down the river in the big rice boat to one of the mill-towns. And so an uneventful life passes away: the greatest desire to live peaceably with all men and observe the ten precepts; the greatest excitement the suspicion of a witch in that lonely house by the nat's pool in the creek.'

The Burmans celebrated, and still celebrate to-day, some of the most graceful festivities of Asia. They have a passion for boat races, cock fights, and village theatricals, and they love light, flowers, and any sport or ceremony which involves splashing water. If sometimes in their history they have dressed dingily, this was because to be conspicuous attracted the tax gatherer; and whenever they have had security they dress in everyday life as for a pageant. They work as little as possible and are pleasingly boastful. Purdah and child marriage are unknown. Often the women work and the men look after the house. Divorce is easy but unusual; there is a charming love poetry. Of their architecture, which expresses very well their temperament, one of the most perceptive of modern travellers has written:-

'The precincts of the Shwe Dagon pagoda contain the world's finest specimens of what I may call the merry-go-round style of architecture and decoration. . . . It seems a sacred Fun Fair, a Luna Park dedicated to the greater glory of Gautama, but more fantastic, more wildly amusing than any Bank Holiday invention. Our memories, after the first visit, were of something so curiously improbable, so deliriously and comically dream-like, that we felt constrained to return the following day to make quite sure that we had really seen it.'

What a people thinks about its past throws light on its tastes and temperament. Burmese history is a record of marvels. The national

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chronicle, a document called the *Glass Palace Chronicle* because it was compiled, fittingly, in a crystal palace, deals with signs and omens, monarchs out of whose mouths came wheels, men able to lift elephants because of acquiring strength through eating dead fakirs, ogres which sit astride the gates of the royal palace and will not go away, beautiful ladies born from water, the miraculous reproduction of Buddha's teeth, wizards who can make the royal palace turn back to front, poisonings, murders, reincarnations, and showers of gems.

[ v ]

The Burmese social and political organization contrasted with the Indian because of its cohesiveness.

The centre was the monarchy. Without this, political life seemed inconceivable; a Burmese king of the sixteenth century once choked with laughter on hearing that Venice was a free city without a king.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the centre was the royal palace. The palace was the symbol of the royal power. Ritual circumambulation of the walls was one of the king's duties. The aim of many conspiracies was to seize the palace in a temporary absence of the monarch; if the rebels succeeded in this, they had gone far towards obtaining a sanction for his deposition and murder. The palace, elegant but insubstantial, made not of stone but of wood—'a mere matchbox', as a journalist said—was an epitome of Burmese civilization, remote from ordinary life but made out of its components. Within its walls several thousand people, elegantly dressed, spent their life in glitter, ceremony, pageants, idleness and intrigue. At the construction of a new palace, it was usual to bury live men at its entrances, their spirits being thus enlisted as a supernatural guard.

It happens that the neighbouring court of Siam, which was in these respects identical with the Burmese, was described in the middle of last century by an English governess named Mrs. Leonowens who taught the numberless royal children. She records the atmosphere of a large ill-run nursery, boredom, the fear of spies, fear of the king, fear of tortures, imprisonment and death. Those who saw the Burmese court from the inside, and not merely one of its periodic durbar ceremonies, gave a similar account.

Some of the titles of the kings of Burma were 'Ruler of land and sea, lord of the rising sun, sovereign of great empires and countries

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and king of all umbrella-bearing chiefs, lord of the mines of gold, silver, rubies, amber, chief of the celestial elephant and master of many elephants, the supporter of religion, the sun-descended monarch, sovereign of the power of life and death, great chief of righteousness, king of kings and possessor of boundless dominions and supreme wisdom, the arbiter of existence'. At his installation the king proclaimed himself with the formula: 'I am foremost in the world. I am the most excellent in all the world. I am peerless in all the world.'

The king's person was holy. He could not be directly named and was addressed in a special dialect, a kind of royal language. Subjects addressing him used of themselves such descriptions as 'dust grains of your sacred feet'. He could not be touched.<sup>1</sup> Even some of the astutest kings seem to have believed that they were invulnerable. His body linen was so sacred that it was used for the printing of scriptures when cast off. The oath of allegiance was taken by drinking water in which the royal weapons had been placed. Fertility of the soil depended on the king performing a ritual sowing. It was supposed that to become a king a man must have been of exceptional virtue in previous lives and that, however monstrously he behaved in his office, he was still entitled to veneration because he had not used up the extraordinary reserves of merit which he had accumulated.<sup>2</sup>

Politics consisted of conspiring; on the accession of a new king his relations likely to be competitors were often exterminated. As the blood of the royal family could not be shed, the princes who were killed were sewn into red velvet sacks and beaten to death with sandalwood staves.

Though the king was absolute and all revolved round him, not all his commands were obeyed. In the reign of the last king, Thibaw, his favourites were put to death without his knowledge; in the war which dethroned him he believed from his ministers that his armies were victorious until the British were actually in Mandalay.

<sup>1</sup> In the neighbouring kingdom of Siam the same taboos existed. When the King of Siam went on the river he was protected with a life-jacket of coco-nuts because, should he fall into the water, none of his subjects could overcome the tabu on touch and attempt his rescue. A King of Ceylon once executed two men who had saved him from drowning. (Gulliver, it may be remembered, incurred great unpopularity in Lilliput from his emergency methods of putting out a fire in the royal palace and saving the King and Queen.)

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Buddhist theory was that a man sentenced to death died not primarily because of his crimes in this life but because his end was fore-doomed by crimes in a previous life. His judges were thereby held guiltless of his blood, and their own reincarnation prospects were not affected adversely.

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The typical monarch built pagodas—the Buddhist shrines with which Burma is covered—carried on slave raids and made war on the chiefs of the border area, seeking their daughters for his harem. His most lively passion was often to collect white elephants, these being holy because Buddha had once incarnated himself in this form. The white elephant was in fact an albino elephant, grey or pink, not white; to be genuine it needed to possess a considerable number of unusual points, and their verification was a nice art. When an approved specimen was found it was sent to the capital with a retinue, garlanded, with a canopy borne over it, feeding off porcelain and gold. Arriving at the palace it was given titles, a landed estate, a diadem, a red parasol, secretaries, and a band. Nursing mothers were appointed to give it milk, nobody might pass it without respectful salutation. It was prayed for, and on its death there was general mourning, the more sincere because its end was thought to bode ill luck.

[ vi ]

The king's authority in the country was exercised at the centre by a council, the Hlutdaw, and in the provinces by governors, whose name 'Province Eaters' shows in what way they were regarded by the people. To be an officer of state was a post of peril. The royal correction was freely used. The entire Hlutdaw was sometimes imprisoned for a day or two. Governors of provinces, called from their palaces to the capital, would be pegged out for three days in the sun, then return to their duties pardoned; and the low esteem in which Burmese kings held their own governors explains their indignation at receiving Embassies from the Governor-General of India and not from the King of England.

Impressive as was the show of the royal capital, the operations of the royal government were limited, and the more so the farther the region was from the court. Indeed its principal anxiety was usually to maintain its circus-like splendour. The amount of silver in the royal treasury was seldom large but it sufficed as the general population subsisted on a barter economy, and the treasury was little more than a security reserve against rebellion.

The administration as it touched the ordinary villager was carried on chiefly by a hierarchy distinct from the royal government. Over each group of fifty or so villages there was found a hereditary officer who was in effect the key figure in the political life of the district. It is perhaps unfortunate that he was usually called a 'headman', for the

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word headman, because of its Indian associations, usually suggests a village 'kulak', while the personages in Burma were the aristocrats of the country. How easy it is in Asiatic countries for the visitor to overlook the very considerable influence of the minor local aristocracy is shown in the southern states of India to-day; because the local dignitaries wear in that hot climate no more clothes than other people and live with little ostentation, they are lost in the background. The Burmese headmen, like western squires or lords of the manor, drew their authority not from royal appointment but from ancient right, and they were the intermediaries between the people and the royal officers. In practice the kings could do little without securing their consent. Respected, usually of ancient family, animated by a long tradition, these officers carried the country on their shoulders. It has been said of Burma that almost all which came from the royal government was bad, almost all from the local government good.

The unworldly society of the church had a government of its own. Its head was a prelate called the Thathanabaing, who was the royal agent and censor; his supervisory powers were supported by the government. Most monks were genuinely averse from secular life. Their pastoral duties gave them, however, a spiritual power which the government could not ignore. On the one hand it deferred to them as long as they performed their proper spiritual rôle. On the other hand it repressed them without scruple if they became seditious. In a civil war a king executed three thousand of them in a single town.

[ vii ]

Such was Burma traditionally, a small country insulated by jungles and mountains from both India and China, its capital city remote from the sea and the highways of the world. It developed its own society, in which there was plenty of bloodshed and oppression, but which, because of the humanity of Buddhism and the excellence of the local government, was among the happiest in Asia.

Its people were also among the most ignorant. Few foreigners came to Burma; fewer Burmans went abroad, even though the holy places of their religion were in neighbouring India, and though the Burmese temperament is often adventurous. Thus, when they came into contact with the British power at the end of the eighteenth century, they despised it and failed to understand their perils. The treatment of British envoys by the Burmese court from then until its final fall in

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1886 is one of the comedies of modern Asiatic history.<sup>1</sup> The Burmese court spoke of granting the British an alliance and of sending a Burmese Army to capture Paris; and in the first war with the British in 1824, the courtiers pre-empted the expected white slaves, and the Burmese army set off to march to Calcutta carrying with it golden chains in which to fetter the Governor-General.

In this first Anglo-Burman war the Burmese fought surprisingly well. In the third war half a century later which ended the independence of the kingdom, the army surrendered quickly; but a guerrilla war followed such as the British had not had to fight anywhere in India and which was a sign of the much greater unity of the people. There was in fact already in existence a Burmese spirit of nationalism, which only the overwhelming power of the British and Indian armies and police forces enabled them to overcome.

<sup>1</sup> A historian summarizes their treatment as follows: 'The court wished envoys to run barefoot and bareheaded in the sun along the roads, grovelling at every corner of the walls and at every spire. . . . One day they would tell the envoy that they were going to present him with two elephants, the next that he must buy his own boats for departure. . . . The king would go into raptures over the presents such as an English coach, or beg for the envoy's own hat and put it on saying delightedly "See. This is a high proof of the envoy's regard for me. He could not do more for his own king. . . ." The envoy would be invited, as a great delicacy, to see an exhibition of fireworks in which scores of deserters were to be burned in the wheels. Sometimes he would be ignored for weeks; then suddenly half a dozen great personages would call on him with the utmost affability asking him to get the Viceroy to obtain a Buddha tooth from Ceylon. One day they would tell him that he must pay enormous bribes to get an audience, the next that the king was longing to see him, the third that they wondered he was still there, why had he not left ages ago? One day it would be announced that an army was about to march against England; another the whole population of Rangoon, headed by the governor, would stampede into the wood because a pilot schooner with despatches for the envoy had appeared in the mouth of the river, carrying two tiny cannon without ammunition.'

## CHAPTER EIGHT



# THE BRITISH IN BURMA

[i]

**T**he British conquered Burma in three stages, the long coastal strips in 1824, the Irrawaddy delta in 1852, and Upper Burma, after much hesitation and against the advice of some concerned in the affair, in 1886. As long as the British had held only Lower Burma, they did little more than occupy key points with a military force and develop the port of Rangoon; when Upper Burma, the heart of the country, was also annexed the influences of British rule played fully upon the land.

For fifty-one years Burma lost its individual identity, being merged with India; in 1937, as the result of the constitutional changes in India, it was restored again to life as a separate country.

The British government in Burma was alien to the country to a greater extent than was British government in India. While, as it has been suggested above, the British Raj in India was really in great part an Indian government, organized locally and operating largely through Indians, Burma on the contrary was a land conquered by the Indo-British power. Many of the subordinate officers were Indians; the British officers, even those who had not received their early training in India, looked to India for standards of orthodoxy; in the days of the earliest annexations, with an incongruity which to-day seems almost beyond belief, the language of the courts was Persian, this being at the time the language of judicial record in India. British officers responded to the charm of the country readily enough, but were unfamiliar with Burmese tradition, and had in any case no power to modify the standard British Indian law which was applied to Burma as a matter of course.

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What happened to Burmese society under British rule has been studied in a series of works by two retired Burma civil servants, Messrs. Furnivall and Harvey, which are not only very informative about Burma, but are a model for detailed investigation of social change and its causes.

[ ii ]

In Burma there was no controversy such as had taken place in India between those who desired to westernize and those who wished to maintain the old institutions. For Burma was conquered at a time when the British were most self-confident. Believing in the absolute superiority of western institutions over the traditional ones, the administrators set themselves to rebuild the society in what was at that time considered the most modern form. By that paradox which has marked the whole British record in Asia, they applied to the reconstruction of a conquered country, not the principles of authoritarian rule, but, at least in social and economic matters, the principles of extreme liberalism, then at the height of their influence. As far as their measures had a common purpose, they sought to make Burma a country fit for Economic and Liberal man.

With this as its programme, a British government was inevitably a force of destruction. Demolition had to precede change. The old society toppled down. To describe the effects of British rule is thus from one aspect like making an inventory of one of the ancient cities of Germany after the Allied air raids, and the disposition may therefore be to condemn it as bringing the unhappiness which goes with such destruction. But Oriental society could not have continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries unchanged, and moreover what the British have set in place of the old society, even if destined itself to change rapidly, has much that is of value, and is unprecedented in the East. To attempt a moral assessment is not very practicable, and all that can be done is description—noting alike what has been overthrown and what substituted.

It is unnecessary to list all that has been done away with. Roughly it included most of the peculiar institutions described in the last chapter. The suppression of the monarchy; the pensioning off of the royal family—queens received Rs. 30 a month, princesses Rs. 10; the setting aside of the rural headmen, that beneficent rural squirearchy described above, and their replacement by government nominees, non-hereditary and enjoying little respect from the people; the virtual



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disestablishment of the Buddhist church ; the elimination of much of what was picturesque, even if childish, such as the cult of the white elephant and the pageantry of the palace, shook Burmese society to pieces and robbed the Burmese state of its essence.

In the vacuum which resulted the government set up new institutions. In total, the effect of British rule was, as in India, the establishment, in a country where it was formerly unknown, of the modern liberal State. In detail, the result of Burma being annexed to India was that the government set up the administrative machine, the law, and the judiciary which had been created in modern India.

Also, as in India, and of great importance for Burma's ultimate recovery of freedom, the government set up the institution of the representative assembly. This appeared first in the form of urban councils, but from 1923 there were rural councils and also a provincial legislature, to which, as in India, government became partly responsible. Later, when Burma was again separated from India, the franchise was made much wider than in India, and the part of the government which was responsible to the assembly was expanded.

Among the acts of construction under the British regime must also be included the rounding off of the Burmese state territorially and the change of its ethnical composition. At the time of the British conquest, Burma had included only Burmans proper and Talaings, but British and Indian arms now almost doubled its area, incorporating in it a larger border area inhabited by Shans and tribes-people who had formerly owed the loosest allegiance or none at all to the Burmese kings.

### [ iii ]

What were the effects of these changes on the life of the ordinary citizen?

The main consequence was to destroy the discipline which Burmese society had evolved in itself for the control of the individual. In the East, individual men had at all times been hedged round by custom, often sanctified by centuries. The Burman of pre-British times had been compelled by public sentiment to follow a certain pattern of life, and in doing this he had achieved a reasonable contentment. But British rule introduced liberal ideas. These glorified the unconstrained individual, and freed him to strike out as he chose. The old discipline was destroyed. The paradox of the British system

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was that the traditional roles of government and subject were reversed. Government became bound by law; the individual on the other hand was unshackled from custom. The ruling principle was that the general good required that the minimum check should be placed on the free movement of capital and labour. Institutions which had enforced custom were repressed, and the individual became free to act as he pleased, subject only to his not infringing or, what was easier, not being caught by the criminal law.

In Burma, more perfectly perhaps than in any other Oriental country, can be seen what happens when a tightly knit society in which every man has his appointed place is dissolved into a collection of free, uncontrolled, and more or less unorganized individuals. The effects can be studied in every stratum of social life and in every class.

In the village the natural leader, the hereditary headman, was deposed, and as a result the village lost its ancient ability to manage its domestic affairs. The successor to the hereditary chief, the headman appointed by government, enjoyed no real primacy or authority, and being unable to act by traditional means and bound by rules which nobody understood, could not restrain, or was forbidden to restrain, the village petty nuisances.

The peasant became free under the new law to dispose of his land without control by the headmen or elders. In consequence he alienated it to strangers. Land changed hands rapidly: aliens came to the village, old inhabitants went away.

The moneylender, free under the new law to lend as much as he pleased and at whatever rate he pleased, engrossed the land in his hands. The village could do nothing to stop him; and, though expropriation on the scale which took place was an evident catastrophe, the Government, because of its attachment to economic liberalism, could not apply any restrictions. Only when a responsible Burmese ministry was set up in 1937 was a law passed to protect the agriculturist, and then its operation was spoiled by bad administration on the part of the ministers themselves.

The individual trader, operating uncontrolled, brought in cheap goods from abroad, and ruined the village handicrafts. The craftsmen—boat-builders, embroiderers, iron-workers, shoe-makers, toy-makers—were swept together into a new labouring class.

Because the village had ceased to be an organic unit, crime increased sensationally. In former times a Burman coming before a village tribunal would swear an oath such as the following: 'If I

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have not seen yet shall say that I have seen—then may I be thus punished. Should innumerable descents of the Deity happen for the regeneration and salvation of mankind, may my erring and migrating soul be found beyond the pale of their memory. . . . May blood flow out of every pore in my body that my crime may be made manifest to the world. If I walk abroad, may I be torn to pieces by four preternaturally endowed lions.' He believed that these penalties might in fact follow perjury, and he told the truth. But he had few scruples in cheating British courts, whose findings were regarded as so erratic that it was said they resembled the spin of the roulette wheel. Thus a sally in the courts had sometimes the same motive as a visit to the casino.

The new middle class, the product of the schools and universities, took to the new professions. If in the civil service there was self-discipline, because of traditions taken over from the civil service in England and India, in other occupations, in law, politics, and journalism, standards of behaviour were low. The new institutions were an avenue for self-advancement, or rather an arena in which men wrestled for a place regardless of rules, any means being permitted. Politics, it has been said, became a racket of a clique of new literates who wielded the instruments of liberal government but despised their fellow-men.

The students, a new class recruited from all sections, less interested in learning than in opportunity, found that by agitation and strikes they could become a political power.

The monks were freed from the control of their Thathanabaing, and some (a minority) fell to the temptation to use their position for worldly profit and power. Men of consequence in the village, they became the sought-after ally of the politicians. Some became absolute pests; the description by Robert Burton of the Jesuits of his day would have fitted them: 'Monks by profession, such as give over the world and the vanities of it, and yet a Machiavellian rout interested in all matters of state: holy men, peacemakers, and yet composed of envy, lust, ambition, hatred and malice, fire-brands, assassins.'

The former cheerfulness of the people turned into a fretful pessimism; the same *malaise* that had afflicted India appeared also in Burma, though in a cruder form. At the beginning of the century, when the effects of British rule were becoming clear, sympathetic British officers commented on the waning self-confidence of the Burmans; life had lost its brightness. Mr. Furnivall describes the na-

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tionalist movement as an instinctive attempt to throw off by fever the poison working in the social system.<sup>1</sup>

Since the movement of labour was uncontrolled, Indian immigrants overran the country. They came to work as labourers on the land, in the docks, and in the enterprises which economic freedom had fostered. Recruited by contractors who intercepted a part of their earnings, they came generally for a season, using Burma as a workshop which they visited for labour. In the years before the war the Indian population was at any one time over one million; in Rangoon, the capital city, Indians were a majority of the population. Indian moneylenders—the famous Chettiars, a caste from Madras—poured in capital; and by 1931 more than a quarter of the rice land of Lower Burma was owned by them.<sup>2</sup>

Permitting this invasion was one of the worst disservices of the British government in Burma. It is true that the Indian labour made possible a much more rapid development of the country than would have been possible had Burmese labour alone been available. But, with the flooding in of an alien population, there grew up all the worst features of plural society—a state in which communities live side by side with no organic connection and with no link except the economic one. Such a society is always more or less diseased. It does not produce men with a civic sense. The hatred of one community for another poisons life.

### [ iv ]

Such were the effects of free society in Burma. Mr. Harvey in a recent book gives a picture of the government and country just before the invasion of the Japanese which should be reflected on by all those

<sup>1</sup> Fielding Hall, a civil servant early in the century, wrote: 'There is nothing more noticeable among the better-class Burmese to-day than their pessimism. They have become depressed. They have little knowledge and that little has disagreed with them. They have got no standards. They are lost. They publish papers in the vernacular which sometimes read like nursery lamentations over imaginary ills. And though they would be leaders of the people, they know not whither to lead them, and the people will not follow.' He contrasts the old and the new administration. 'For a Burmese official of the old days, dressed in his rich Mandalay silk, with his gold umbrella borne by men behind him, you have a native official of to-day riding in a cheap copy of an English dog-cart. He wears cotton socks and patent leather shoes.'

<sup>2</sup> The Chettiars, who came from a single district in Madras, built up an astonishing structure of banking and moneylending over all South-East Asia. They were like the Lombards of medieval Europe. Each Chettiar is accustomed to mix in with his operating capital a loan from the principal Chettiar temple. This brings luck.

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who feel that the introduction of western forms of life is the remedy for Oriental troubles.

'Members of the legislature were not going to vote for ministers who did not make it worth their while. Not that they were all mercenary, but they themselves were being subject to pressure. The electorate regarded government as a cornucopia, an inexhaustible source of money and favours. If you wanted a minor appointment for a friend, your member seemed the natural person to ask; or if a local officer refused your requests, however inadmissible, you asked your member to have him transferred. And members were often in a position to get you your wish, because no ministry had a stable majority or knew from one month to another how long it would last. . . .

'Bribes had been paid under the old bureaucracy, but on a smaller scale because they were paid only to subordinates who claimed to have their master's ear, and the English officer himself never heard of it, or if he did, he was incredulous. But now that bribery was no longer checked at the district level, now that it went straight up through the entourage even to the minister himself, the price naturally rose. Officers in the Class II services—what in English we call the executive grade just below the administrative—found they had to pay a whole year's salary to get or avoid a transfer. There is no secret about these things: they were publicly debated on the floor of the House.

'It was the ministers themselves to whom the corruption was due. . . . The newer generation of Burmese officers, the graduates, were often as good lads as you could wish. . . . It was ministerial pressure which led them into evil ways. Police officers found themselves suddenly transferred when they were on the track of a local gangster who had the ear of the minister's supporter. Some ministers even sent messages to a judge on the bench telling him what sentence to pass, as the accused was a friend of theirs.

'Outside in the country at large there was growing unrest; it was now fostered by secret societies of youths, some of them harmless, others not so harmless; but it had begun long before the 1937 constitution; indeed despite its half-baked slogans, its aping of the west, it was the expression of an immemorial nationalism. But the constitution had been heralded as the harbinger of a new heaven and a new earth. And it was the ministers themselves who raised these hopes. Now that they were in office they were called upon to fulfil them. . . .

'(There were pogroms of Indians), there were strikes, both industrial strikes which were openly political, and school strikes in sympathy with them. Students and schoolchildren would picket the

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secretariat—the equivalent of our Whitehall—to prevent ministers entering their offices. Or again schoolchildren and students, 2,000 of them, including little girls aged ten and eleven, would go on hunger strike, causing a cabinet crisis until it was discovered that a band of devoted mothers was surreptitiously feeding them. Then scores of women would lie across the tram-lines, stopping the traffic. And monks would roam the streets caning or even tearing the clothes off Burmese ladies who dared to buy from shops which were under some political ban or to wear clothes of which they disapproved. And the everlasting processions continued, sometimes carrying the hammer and sickle, or even the swastika. There was little bloodshed but there was widespread intimidation. The authorities seldom used force; when they did, the wrong people—as usually happens in a crowd—were sometimes knocked on the head, and this would provoke fresh processions. . . . The students were the organizers of every agitation, and sometimes even the ministers, grown men, had to seek their permission before accepting office.’

These were the results of a sincere and respectable endeavour to set up a liberal system in Burma. At this account of a twentieth-century civilization run wild, the reader may feel that it echoes something he has read before; he will find it in the account of the democratic city from the eighth book of Plato’s *Republic*:

‘“Has not a man licence therein to do what he will?”

‘“Yes, so we are told.”

‘“And clearly, where such licence is permitted every citizen will arrange his own manner of life as suits his pleasure.”

‘“Clearly he will.”

‘“A democratical city insults those who are obedient to the rulers with the titles of willing slaves and worthless fellows: whilst the rulers who carry themselves like subjects and the subjects who carry themselves like rulers, it does, both privately and publicly, honour and commend. . . . Does not the prevailing anarchy steal into private houses and spread on every side? The schoolmaster fears and flatters his scholars and the scholars despise their masters and also their tutors. The young copy their elders and enter the lists with them both in talking and acting, and the old men condescend so far as to abound in wit and pleasantry, in imitation of the young, in order to avoid the imputation of being morose or domineering. . . . Truly even horses and asses adopt a gait expressive of remarkable freedom and dignity, and run at anybody who meets them in the streets, if he does not get out of their way.”

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“Now, putting all these things together, do you perceive that they amount to this, that the soul of the citizens is rendered so sensitive as to be indignant and impatient at the smallest symptom of slavery? For surely you are aware that they end by making light of the laws themselves, whether statute or customary, in order that, as they say, they may not have the shadow of a master.”

Plato describes how from a society of this kind there emerges ultimately a tyranny.

[ v ]

In 1942 the Japanese invaded Burma. The welcome they received from a part of the country and their subsequent collision with Burmese nationalism might have been foreseen. By their three-year occupation, by the puppet government they installed, by the further turmoil of the campaign which ejected them, and by the economic ravage, Burmese society, already invalid, was further wounded and buffeted. The old type of political leaders, bred in the parliament, was being pushed from the stage by a new type which had thrust its way forwards by organizing private armies based on the quisling army the Japanese had encouraged them to raise. ‘The British’ a Burmese leader has said, ‘taught the Burmese a soft kind of politics, alien to our tradition, though we were trying to pick it up and to understand the value of votes and mass appeal. Then came the Japanese as a tremendously effective machine and we saw the glamour and the power of the armed man, who in every argument carried the day.’ The younger men, leaders of these private armies, wished to seize power dramatically for themselves. That all was changing, that this was the age for energetic authoritarian rule, that the future was theirs if they did not shrink from violence—these were the facts which burned in their minds.

Only one thing remained stable in Burma and that was the Buddhist religion. In a world of collapsing faiths, most Burmese continued to be through and through dyed with Buddhist ideas. The most bloodthirsty or doctrinaire younger politician kept the Buddhist Lent, visited the pagoda, was shocked by impiety, and revered, if he did not practise, charity. The dissoluteness of the monks had not discredited religion. Nor did the spread of modern science shake belief, for Buddhism—being a discipline which in Burmese eyes gives peace, being based on incontrovertible facts of psychology, and having no metaphysics which can be disproved—can be as much the religion of industrial and scientific man of the twentieth century as of the courtier or peasant of the ancient world.

## CHAPTER NINE



# CEYLON

[ i ]

Ceylon, in size only about three-quarters as large as Ireland, was of less importance in the Empire than Burma. Ceylonese civilization is like that of Burma, except that it has been for centuries more receptive of Indian influence. Ceylon has, for example, a caste system, while in Burma the only trace of caste is in the disabilities of certain peculiar small sections of the people.

The Ceylonese people are kindly, idle, irresponsible fatalists. As devoted Buddhists as are the Burmans, they claim, without truth, that Buddha himself visited the island, and that it was later proselytized by a son of the famous Indian emperor of the third century B.C., Asoka, who arrived in Ceylon by levitation, carrying with him a shoot of the Bo tree under which Buddha received enlightenment. A tooth of Buddha, preserved at Kandy, was a kind of palladium of the State. The tooth had a curious history. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese from Goa seized what they thought was this relic, and their Viceroy negotiated with the Ceylonese for its restoration on payment of ransom; but the Catholic Church intervened, forbidding traffic in heathen fetiches, and the tooth which the Portuguese held was thereupon destroyed. But the Ceylonese claimed that the Portuguese had captured only a replica of the tooth, and produced again the alleged authentic one. It was said 'The kingdom goes with the tooth', and a sentry was posted over it in British times to see that no enterprising rebel stole it.

In its two thousand years of history, Ceylon was divided between warring kingdoms; and repeated invasion from India left an Indian population which kept its own civilization. Each petty kingdom was



## CEYLON

of the same pattern, in most respects like the Burmese one. The centre of government was the king and the palace, and, as in Burma, there stood between king and people a class of hereditary chiefs or headmen, at once officers of government and peoples' representatives. A peculiarity of Ceylon was the scale on which the government demanded compulsory service from the people. The monarch turned his population at various times into a giant labour corps which built palaces, cleared jungles, laid out gardens, and constructed the tanks and irrigation system which was the great achievement of ancient Ceylon.

### [ ii ]

The Portuguese conquered the maritime provinces in the sixteenth century, and the Dutch succeeded them, but the British were the first western people to conquer all the island.

Except in the first few years after the British conquest, Ceylon was not, like Burma, ruled from India, but from the Colonial Office in London, and its experience was perhaps a little happier than Burma's.

Its first and not very successful governor, Lord Guilford, the son of the affable and engaging if calamitous Prime Minister, Lord North, is one of the more notable forgotten eccentrics of the nineteenth century. In the history of British dependencies, in which only institutions are alive and interesting, and in which persons are all uniform and anonymous—a gallery of discreet and unarresting faces<sup>1</sup>—a slightly incompetent governor is a red-letter day. Guilford's governorship was indeed no more than an Oriental diversion in a career devoted to Greece. Becoming a Hellenic enthusiast while an undergraduate at Oxford, he toured Greece, joined the Græc Orthodox Church, and wrote a Pindaric Ode in honour of Catherine the Great, then the hope of the Hellenes. After a spell in the House of Commons he became Secretary of State in Corsica, then under British occupation and a little earlier associated with an even more remarkable eccentric. In 1801 began his seven years as Governor of

<sup>1</sup> No Empire has such an empty Pantheon as the British. A few local magistrates built themselves legends which have survived for a hundred years; but for the most part the Empire was sustained by the competent nameless. The habits and minds of the governors changed from generation to generation, cocked hats and hard drinking and classical scholarship gave way to the bearded and evangelical, and this to the harassed and neat civil servant of the present day. Few officers challenged attention for their personal qualities. One of the magistrates of the Indian Government whose eccentricities once attracted public notice in England was named Snodgrass, and it is possible that the fancy of Dickens may have been excited by his misdeeds.

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Ceylon. When, at its end, he returned to Europe, he founded an Ionian University at Corfu, receiving for this purpose the support of the Prince Regent. The remainder of his life he spent at Corfu, as Chancellor, eschewing European dress, and habitually wearing classical costume.

In the domestic administration of Ceylon, Guilford reformed the revenue system, started schools, and distinguished himself by a humanity and politeness which contrasted him with his Dutch predecessors; his mishaps came from a shady negotiation with the prime minister of the still independent Ceylonese king in the interior, a transaction which recalled the Borgias at their most ingenious. The prime minister, a monster of superlative wickedness, was to incite his master to aggression against the British which would justify British retaliation. In this intrigue Guilford was outwitted; the Ceylonese king produced the outrages but his prime minister did not, as had been arranged, join the British; a military expedition had in consequence to be sent to Kandy, and was defeated and massacred, a defeat not avenged for twelve years.

The King of Kandy was finally deposed in 1815. The monarchy and the pageant of life which accompanied it were abolished.

### [ iii ]

The upset of national life after conquest was less than in Burma, and this was the stranger because at one time Ceylon became one of the favourite testing grounds for the colonial ideas of the utilitarian politicians who were so powerful in the eighteen-thirties. Their experiments affected, however, the European civil servant and his amenities of life rather than Ceylonese society. The headmen of the villages, the key figures of the old system, were retained, though the government at times suspected their loyalty, and at times under humanitarian influence reduced their powers which they had too often used extortionately against the people. These headmen still exist to-day, and have on the whole played a useful part in maintaining a native spirit in the administration.

Similarly the village councils—like the panchayats in India, but in Ceylon called gansabhawas—were kept alive more successfully in Ceylon than elsewhere in the British Empire. Indeed as early as the seventies the government tried with some success to modernize them and make them more active, both as petty judicial tribunals and as executive agents.

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Even the Buddhist church remained better organized than in Burma. For though the Government, because of the pressure of Christian missionaries, refused to sully itself with paganism by becoming its head and protector, it provided, after a time of some uncertainty, a system of regulation by trustees which has functioned fairly satisfactorily.

In spite of the differences, Ceylon's history was basically the same as that of the rest of the Empire. Most of the same innovations appeared as in India and Burma, and produced the same results. For example, the setting up of western courts turned awry the smooth life of the village no less than it had done in India and Burma. The villages were full of lawyers, lawyers' touts, and petition writers—'the fomentors and conductors of the petty war of village vexation'—and the law proved to be an instrument with almost limitless possibilities for the ancient Oriental game of harassing enemies. In 1869 charges were brought in the courts against one-thirteenth of the total population, and only in 10 per cent of these cases did the charges lead to convictions. In the same year one-third of the adult population appeared in the courts in one role or another, as accused, or witnesses, or petitioners.

Furthermore, as in Burma, the social and political life became complicated by the arrival of large numbers of Indian coolies. These came to work chiefly on the European plantations. As they joined a resident population which was settled from ancient times and was the result of wars between Ceylon and India, the Indian hold in Ceylon was even more formidable than in Burma. The latest census figures showed one and a half million Indians against four and a half million Ceylonese. Communal hostility became one of the chief themes of politics.

Ceylon shared the experience of the rest of the Empire in experimenting with parliamentary government. Parliamentary institutions were set up in the present century. Here Ceylon's experience was strange. In the initial stages of popular representation, first launched in 1910, the relations of legislature and executive were so bad that in 1928 a Royal Commission said of them that if they had been a partnership at all it had been like holy matrimony at its worst. In a search for a remedy the model taken for a new constitution was the very peculiar one of the London County Council. The result was scarcely happier. Ceylonese politics were not dignified; the communal suspicion between Ceylonese and Indians caused the same unseemly struggle as communal tension does wherever it exists; cabinets were

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weak and divided; no strong parties developed as in India; politics were dominated by a few outstanding personalities, and the politicians grouped themselves round these rather than around programmes.

[ iv ]

Ceylon passed through the same emotional and intellectual changes as the rest of British Asia. Young Ceylonese adopted the ideas of the times, became first nationalist, then 'leftists', and linked their nationalism with the Buddhist church. The Young Men's Buddhist Association was at one time one of the chief political bodies. Ceylonese nationalists suspect the British of manipulating the communal conflict; they have resented the alleged influence of European tea planters with the Colonial Office in London; they believe that western capital exploits the island. But as Europeans had been in Ceylon longer than in most other parts of Asia—the Portuguese arrived early in the sixteenth century and created a large Christian population<sup>1</sup>—the people of Ceylon are more sophisticated in dealing with the West, and racial feeling is less strong than in either India or Burma. In the more recent time Ceylon was fortunate and escaped the experience of invasion and campaigning during the war with Japan.

<sup>1</sup> In 1556 one of the Ceylonese kings became a Christian.

## CHAPTER TEN



# MALAYA

[ i ]

**I**n India, Burma and Ceylon, the British governments had been imposed on ancient civilizations and close packed populations. But in Malaya the history of the British Asiatic Empire was different because there the British occupied a more or less empty land. The territory taken over was only a provincial and scantily peopled part of the Malay world, whose centre was in Java. Because of this circumstance the British acquisition of Malaya resembled that of the empty dominions of Canada and Australia, though in Malaya it was Asiatics, not Anglo-Saxons, who under the British flag came to colonize the country.

The history of the Malays under British rule—the scanty people who were found in possession—has been different from that of other Asiatic peoples in that they have changed less.

Pre-British Malaya is easy to reconstruct. Malays of that time were plentifully described, and won the liking of most of those who studied them. One of the first European visitors, a Portuguese of the seventeenth century, said: 'These Moors who are named Malays are very polished people, and gentlemen, musical, gallant and well-proportioned.' Different observers have described them as handsome, athletic, idle, easy-going, improvident, vain, swaggering, given to borrowing, not given to cringing, faithful in their undertakings, capable of great endurance, hospitable to strangers though reserved, lovers of bright clothes and curious weapons, governed by a minute code of manners, conservative, and no great respecters of Europeans. They loved picnics, poetry and craftsmanship in gold and silver. They had a passion for the sea. Their women were witty, talked in a

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language compounded of riddles and allusions which it was an art to understand, and, for Moslems, were relatively untrammelled. The nervous disorders prevalent among a people often throw light on their temperament. Malays were subject to two peculiar diseases. One was to 'run amok', about which much has been written; the other, called 'latak', was a state in which the victim loses all self-control and sense of identity, imitating the actions of every person catching his attention.

In religion Malays had been Moslems since the fifteenth century; why and how they were converted at this particular time is still not very clearly understood. Earlier, when connection with India had been close and Indian princes had ruled the country, religion had been a kind of provincial Hinduism; to-day this ancient layer of faith still crops out, especially among the people on the eastern side of the peninsula which is the less developed. The Hindu gods Kali, Vishnu and Ganesh are invoked in spells by Moslem magicians; Garuda, the Hindu demon bird, is taken in procession; Moslems engage in ceremonial washings unknown to their own religion and derived from Hinduism; the king of the Moslem jinns is Siva the Hindu god; meteors are the arrows of Arjuna, the Hindu thunder-hero; the bull with the forty horns which holds up the world is called Nanda, which is the name of the sacred bull of Siva; the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana, is known all over the northern parts; the shrines of saints and holy men throughout the peninsula camouflage ancient Hindu temples, and justify in the service of a new faith the habit of pilgrimage which was so important a part of the old. In addition to this vestigial Hinduism, there is a yet more ancient animism. Malays believe in four Great Spirits, talking animals, sympathetic magic, and in familiar spirits which are apt to carry out terrifyingly the wishes which a man may form lightly in moments of passion.

Besides their Hindu inheritance the Malays had received through the Arabs who converted them and through their subsequent contact with the Arab world the traditions, history and ideas of the Middle East. They were especially interested in Alexander the Great, whose son and successor they believed to have been Aristotle; he was supposed to have visited the Malayan jungle as almost everywhere else in the Moslem world. Omens, divination and the interpretation of dreams aroused the same interest as is found in Egypt and Persia.

How this jungle people collected tradition from all over the world, like a child collecting a museum, is still shown to-day in the ceremonial of the Sultans' courts. At the installation of the Sultan of

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Perak, the monarch, wearing a sword with an Arabic inscription said to have belonged to Alexander, his reputed ancestor, is proclaimed by the hereditary court herald in a Sanskrit formula unintelligible to all those present; in the Sultan's ear is whispered as the Sultan's secret the name of his Indian princely forebears; the Sultan stands under a yellow umbrella, the emblem of royalty in China; and the names of the drums and trumpets which sound on his proclamation are Persian.

### [ ii ]

Such was the ancient society. As might be supposed, when the British came to Malaya the political structure was not very complex. The peninsula was divided between more than a dozen sultans and chiefs. Since there were no great differences between the States, the account of the State of Perak by one of the civil servants who visited it in the eighteen-sixties is thus really an account of Malaya as a whole.

‘(There were) miles upon miles of forest, broken only by silver streaks, where one might, from a very high place, catch glimpses of some river. Excluding a single district, there was not a yard of road in the country, and hardly a decent house: there was not even a bridle path, only jungle tracks made by wild beasts and used by charcoal burners and a few pedestrians. The commerce of the country was by rivers; they were the highways, and the people would not leave them, unless they were compelled to do so. The country folk moved about but little, for they knew the difficulties too well. A boat journey of a hundred miles down river would take a week, and back again a month or more. When people of consideration had to journey by land, they travelled on elephants if they could get them, and cut their way through the jungle. Pedestrians had to foot it as they might; over the roots, through the thorns, wading or swimming rivers and streams, ploughing through miles of bogs and mud in the heat and rain, stung by everything that stings, and usually spending two or three nights in the jungle with any kind of shelter that a chopper and the forest could supply. As for food, the traveller or his people carried it, and even in villages it was practically impossible to buy anything except an old hen.

‘The Malay villages, always on the banks of a stream, were composed of palm thatched wooden huts raised above the ground. These huts were scattered about, without the smallest attempt at regularity, in orchards of palm and fruit trees, no attempt being made to clear

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the undergrowth of weeds and bushes. There would be a mosque, perhaps two, if the village was large—and behind it, in a swamp, there were usually some rice-fields. The people lived on what they could catch in the river or the swamp, on the fruit of their orchards, or such vegetables as would grow without tending; poultry and goats were a luxury.'

In Perak, even at this period, commercial enterprise had begun, and in one district some adventurous gangs of Chinese worked the tin mines. Here conditions were even more unsettled.

'Like vultures to a carcass, all robbers, thieves and murderers collected round the mines, ready to despoil, by every means, anyone who possessed anything worth taking. If there was a complaint (poor people knew better than to make one) and the parties were hailed before some chief or rajah, or swashbuckler with a few determined followers, the result was usually that everyone concerned returned poorer than he went.'

The Sultan of Perak at this time, who was the seventeenth in his dynasty, had to contend with two rival claimants, and the country was thus kept in a slightly greater state of turbulence than was normal elsewhere. The State government was curiously organized; the main offices were shared out by a strictly regulated system among the senior members of the royal family (a system found in other Asiatic kingdoms and still to-day existing in Nepal). Beneath these high officers, the State hierarchy descended through Great Chiefs, Lesser Chiefs and Minor Chiefs, all hereditary, to the hereditary headmen in the village. Princes of the blood were numerous, idle and turbulent, and politics, like those of England in the later Middle Ages, were in part dictated by the need to find them employment, for when not engaged in external wars they took to rebellion. The courts and encampments, if not distinguished by their architecture, were gay, full of bright clothes, and riotous.<sup>1</sup> Round the Sultan frolicked a retinue of young men, called the King's Youths, licensed to do what they pleased. And indeed for any man of consequence there was neither police nor law.

The ordinary villager took no part in government. He was obliged to supply free labour for so many days to the Sultan, but money-taxes were low or non-existent. There was a gulf between the Raja class and the villager, but there was no class hostility; and the loyalty of the

<sup>1</sup> I have met a retainer of a Malay court whose sole duty was to have hairs plucked nightly from his beard in which fighting crickets could be suspended in water for their baths.



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Malays to their chiefs was and remains one of their chief peculiarities. There was more land than cultivators, and one month's work in the year was enough to provide a family with its livelihood. The ugliest blot on the country was slavery; it is curious that in this very unmercantile and improvident society, slavery was the penalty for debt.

Such was Perak in the middle years of the last century, and most of the other dozen states of Malaya were in the same condition.

### [ iii ]

Change came about from the advent first of the British, then of the Chinese.

The East India Company established itself in 1786 in the port of Penang. This they obtained by a treaty with the Sultan of Kedah; the circumstances of the agreement were ambiguous, but a good case has been made for saying that the cession was in return for a guarantee of protection against his neighbours and Siam, a guarantee on which, if it really existed, the Company later defaulted. In 1819 the British occupied Singapore and thus constituted the Straits Settlements. Their motive was to obtain trading posts from which to break the Dutch trading monopoly of Indonesia. The slowness with which they spread their authority from these footholds over the interior shows a languidness in the supposedly voracious British imperialism; it was said as late as the middle of the nineteenth century that very few of the officials in Singapore could even have named all the Malay States. But in 1874 the government of the Straits Settlements negotiated a treaty with Perak by which the Sultan more or less voluntarily accepted a British resident and undertook to carry out British advice, and, after this start, similar treaties were concluded one by one with the other Sultans. Thereby Malaya was in fact, if not in form, incorporated in the Empire.

The rather catastrophic disintegration of the traditional society which had been the effect of British rule in other parts of the Empire did not, however, take place in Malaya. Indeed in Malaya the effect of British rule was opposite. It was to conserve. The reason for this was that Malaya, unlike India, Burma and Ceylon, had not been conquered; the native rulers had not been set aside, but had voluntarily asked for British protection.

Contrast what happened in Malaya and in Burma. In Burma the ancient monarchy had been abolished; in Malaya the Sultanates were carefully preserved, and it was through the Sultans' own native

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machinery of government that the British advisers operated. In Burma, land under the liberal economic system was allowed to change hands like any other chattel; over parts of Malaya land was strictly reserved. In Burma a large educated intelligentsia was called into being; in Malaya there was no university, not even at Singapore. In Burma was set up a complicated western apparatus of law courts and parliament; in Malaya, government was carried on through the ancient institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Change there was, of course. Malaya changed differently from Burma. But it changed none the less. The comparatively young Residents who were sent to the courts of the Sultans persuaded them, with no more sanction than the distant and seldom demonstrated might of the British Government at Singapore, to modernize their administration. In less than half a century the country was transformed from an anarchist pirate land into a neat territory with perfect security and with roads and health services among the best in any Asiatic country. Even a unification of the country was carried through, some of the rulers agreeing to enter a federation, and all to follow a co-operative policy dictated by the British.

The transformation was aided by the economic change when, early in the century, it was found that Malaya was one of the best countries for producing rubber, the demand for which had been increased by the invention of the motor-car; and as the sultanates had changed into modern administrations, so did the jungle into orderly plantations. Aesthetically the results were perhaps deplorable. Mr. Aldous Huxley once described thus the look of the country from the railway:

‘Miserably scraggy little trees planted neatly in rows flanked the railway and continued to flank it during almost all the rest of the day. We rolled through literally hundreds of miles of potential Dunlops, of latent golf-balls, and hot-water bottles to be.’

But rubber meant wealth, and wealth in the hands of a government means, or can mean, modernization.

Yet, profound as were these changes, the traditional Malayan society remained screened from their effects. Government policy resulted in making it a kind of native reservation. The tamed and modernized Sultans enjoyed still the feudal loyalty of their peoples. While the other peoples of the eastern world were in chaos, the

<sup>1</sup> During the Napoleonic Wars, the British had occupied Java, and Sir Stamford Raffles spent four years as Governor. His administration in Java was more on the principles later followed in Burma than on those later followed in Malaya. Hitherto Raffles's work in Java has been highly esteemed: recently it has been criticized for the same reasons that British administration in Burma is criticized.

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Malays continued to live in their villages, happier probably than in the past, peace having been established, but with ideas and institutions little altered. They developed only a very small urban middle class and no Malay Press or political party. Even the economic changes did not much affect them; since land was so plentiful, they were not dispossessed on any great scale to make room for the plantations, and the labour for them was recruited from other races, chiefly from immigrant Indians.

This cautious preservation of the ancient institutions was the more curious because, while the institutions remained intact, the people which they served were in fact no longer the same as those who had evolved them. During the British period the Malay population increased from 300,000 to more than two million, and were recruited partly from immigrants from the Dutch East Indies where society had already changed its ancient shape. For the new arrivals the old Malay institutions were as unfamiliar a political dress as would have been institutions copied from India or Burma.

Which were the better off, the Burmese whose native institutions had been destroyed, or the Malays whose civilization had been so carefully preserved? Probably the Malays were happier; but idyllic though their life for a time may have seemed, the sands of their happiness were running out. Perhaps it would have been better for them if the innovations from the West had been allowed to cause more upset than they did to the old social system. By failing to modernize, the Malays were failing to develop the instruments of self-protection against a threat to their life which under British rule became ever more menacing. This was the influx into their country of the astute and tenacious Chinese?

[ iv ]

Chinese had been in Malaya from early times. Commercial zeal and the overcrowding in their own country propelled them all over the South Sea: this movement is likely to be one of the continuing population drives throughout this century. At first they came to Malaya as audacious gangs exploiting the tin mines. Though their presence might be formally sanctioned by the rulers they maintained their position by a constant war with the Malays. A British officer wrote:

'In the old days the Malays had a game called Main China, each man betting on the number of the coins which a passing Chinese

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carried in his pouch, and whether they were odd or even. Thereafter, when the bets had been made, they would kill the Chinese and count the coins. . . .

“They might have done that without killing the Chinaman,” I said.

“It is true”, rejoined the Raja, “but it was a more certain way, and moreover, it increased their pleasure.”

The Chinese gangs fought also with one another. One of the first British officers in Perak describes how on visiting the Chinese settlement he found the leader standing at a large table paying so much cash for each head brought in of members of the rival gang.

The establishment of orderly government changed the role of the Chinese and increased their importance. For order meant the building of railways and roads; and in the more or less empty land whose few inhabitants scorned coolie work, labour was the instrument chiefly needed by government. Modern Malaya is built on coolie bones. Immigrants from the south-east provinces of China arrived in large numbers; their import was organized at great profit by labour contractors and shipping companies and known as the ‘pig business’. In the last census, before the outbreak of war, it was found that Chinese with 2·4 million outnumbered the Malays with 2·2 million.

In addition to the Chinese, nearly one million Indians came to the country, chiefly to work on the rubber plantations.

The Chinese settlers, like the Indians, were not the cream of their own country, but were the adventurous and turbulent excess of population from South China. Educated Chinese regarded them with contempt just as stay-at-home English people in the last century looked doubtfully at colonials. A part came only for a few years and then returned home with their savings; but a part settled in the country. Men outnumbered women. Their society became stratified, groups forming themselves according to the length of time their members had been in Malaya. In the peculiar circumstances of the country they developed a kind of civilization of their own; it has been said that they worshipped the Virgin Mary, the Prophet Mohammed, and all the ghosts in Singapore; and the worship of a sea goddess who originated in South China has been curiously elaborated. Though most came as labourers, they gradually established a strong position as village shopkeepers, pedlars, merchants and moneylenders. They dug themselves in and took over almost as a monopoly the lower part of the trading life on which modern Malaya depended. In Singapore they began in the years before the recent war

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to threaten even the preserves of the Europeans, especially in banking.

The eventual supremacy of the Chinese in Malaya was thus the threat with which the Malays were faced. Two peoples confronted each other who were the opposite extremes of human development. One was dour and commercial to a fault: the other, reckless and uncalculating to a fault. But the Malays, unaccustomed to political action, did nothing effective to safeguard themselves, and merely begged the government to restrict the immigration. Various other circumstances delayed a major communal clash. Competition between the communities was padded; there was more land than population; Malays could always cultivate; and though they resented their exploitation by Chinese merchants, few wished to go into commerce themselves. It was indeed the government which first was apprehensive at the change which had come about. Remittances by Chinese to their families in China itself drained the country's wealth and were a kind of colonial exploitation. Moreover, valuable as were the Chinese as a labour corps, politically they were of uncertain allegiance. If some were glad to escape the heavy hand of Chinese government, another part was likely to be an instrument for any Chinese government with which to spread its influence in the South Seas: this was the more to be feared since it is Chinese law and tradition that a Chinese, wherever he goes, remains Chinese, and though naturalized in a foreign country cannot renounce his allegiance to China. The government therefore for a time discouraged Chinese political activity, even proscribing their national party the Kuomintang, and supported the Sultans in their refusal to accord the Chinese a Malayan citizenship. It also took powers to banish summarily any Chinese who was politically a nuisance, and indeed in the twenty years before 1931 deported about 20,000.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN



# THE BRITISH ORIENTAL CIVILIZATION

[ i ]

Such, in broadest outline, was the impressive structure of the British Empire in Asia, only three or four decades ago the secure home of peace, and seemingly one of the strongest and least troubled political structures in the world.

If British government disintegrated the old society—and the analysis above dwells necessarily on its destructive power—it also created a new society. Its achievement went beyond the importing into Asia of the new material apparatus of life, the railways, automobiles, factories, artillery, which had been invented in the West. Indeed it is sometimes claimed that in bringing into being a new way of life and new institutions the British created virtually a separate Asian civilization, distinct from that of the past, distinct from that of the Asian countries outside the Empire.

What is the truth in this claim? It is hard to answer. But certain misconceptions may be removed. Whatever the British may have done, they did not set up a purely western civilization in the place of Oriental civilization. What is western civilization? What unity has the West? What is the common quality in life in Great Britain, the Latin countries, Germany, and Russia? Great Britain acted as a funnel through which there passed into the East the ideas current in a limited portion of the West at a limited period of history, these, operating in various ways, blending with some of the indigenous ideas, extirpating others, themselves being modified, engendered a new hybrid system.

This new civilization was curious in that nearly all its valuable

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features were political. It is not that the British influence did not affect profoundly all other departments of life besides the political; but in the arts and learning the results in all the countries of the Empire had been chiefly dissolution and a kind of anarchy. The most visible outward sign of the British Empire in Asia was the prevalence of Victorian Gothic;<sup>1</sup> no future generations will visit the remains of the public buildings of Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore as to-day the tourist in Roman Asia visits Baalbek and Palmyra. The depressing English society—described by E. M. Forster for India and Somerset Maugham for Malaya—was hardly the setting for a Renaissance,<sup>2</sup> though it did certainly produce the scholars by whom Oriental learning was resuscitated. British Asia, especially India, has had its indigenous philosophers and artists, but most of the cultural life has been imitation, either of the past or of the contemporary West. In the religious life, Islam developed a modernist wing, Hinduism discovered a new interest in ethics, young men became agnostic or romantic atheists, but in none of the lands was the period a red-letter one. Admittedly genius receives often more admiration in a later generation than in its own, being often totally unrecognized while it flourishes, but whoever travelled in British Asia in its last phase and searched the bookshops, the universities, and the art galleries was fairly certain that no gems were lurking unseen. Nor, in spite of a few outstanding figures, were the previous two generations any richer.

It may perhaps be said that the British in Asia introduced a reform in education, or an outlook which valued the reasoning or inventive faculty above the memory. To learn by rote has been the tradition in Asia and this has often shackled the mind or dulled the imagination. Or it may be argued that the British introduced a scientific outlook. But did they really, except among a very small anglicized class? Reverence for the pandit had been succeeded by reverence for the printed word (derived indeed from the old and admirable respect for learning) and belief in the scriptures by belief that to be published is to be authoritative. If modern civilization is based on science, it is at least problematical whether the East by its own resources can support it.

Only in the political life was something new, orderly and con-

<sup>1</sup> There are some good earlier buildings in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

<sup>2</sup> It is ironical that the first educated Englishman known to have visited India was a Jesuit father who was a poet and wrote in an Indian dialect a poem of eleven thousand couplets. This was a false dawn.

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siderable brought into being. How is this civilization—the British Oriental political civilization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—to be described? It is not the West European liberal system transplanted to the East, for much of the old Oriental structure of politics had been preserved, such as the administrative system (in part), the use of pomp and circumstance, the reliance on police, the exploitation of the age-old prestige of government. But this ancient machinery had been touched by a wing; it operated—with lapses—as if informed by a liberal spirit.

Perhaps the essential features of the civilization can be shown by a contrast between the presuppositions in the British countries and those outside the Empire. Lord Cromer describes how a young Bengali, asked to consider the perils of brigandage if British rule was withdrawn—this was long before Indian politics had developed as they have done since—replied, 'I should have no fear. I should apply to the High Court for protection.' That law was always ultimately supreme had become an axiom; its breakdown was unthinkable.

### [ ii ]

The British Oriental civilization was a changing thing; what was found at one half-century did not exist in the next: moreover what was true of India was often not true of Ceylon or Malaya. But certain characteristics distinguished it during nearly all its phases and, except for certain peculiar areas, in all the countries it touched.

The British system was a truncated liberalism: liberalism without self-government. It was liberal in that the rights of the subject were respected; and authoritarian, at least partially, in that the subjects did not rule.

In all the countries of the Empire, the governments left the individual more free from control than had ever before been known in Asia. So long as he did not infringe the law—an up-to-date and reasonably humane law—the individual was free to do what he pleased. He could travel, choose his career, educate his children, speculate, and (within very wide limits) agitate, as he wished. The individual was left alone partly because of the very backwardness in economic policy for which British administration is now often condemned. There was a relatively free Press.

Thus far the type of state was the liberal one of Victorian England. But it was authoritarian in that the peoples were quite clearly not sovereign. In the central period of the civilization, government was



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not the agent by which the people worked its will, and though the development of popular assemblies began to bring about a change, government until very recently has remained something superimposed.

The system was unstable because peoples cannot rest in a liberty half-way house. Men desire not only the negative freedom of not being interfered with by government, but what has been called the 'positive freedom' of creating, by means of the power of the State, the environment in which they are to live. Thus, when they are freed from the power of government operating as a despotism without principles such as had been the traditional Oriental State, they, after a period of drawing breath and relaxation, seek to gain control of the government to use it to transform their society. Any healthy social class presses for a share of political power and resents paternalism.

In the British Asiatic Empire, this demand grew up first in India, and was reflected in Ceylon and Burma. When it arose, the British had to decide whether in defence of their regime to curtail the freedom of the subject, thus ending the liberalism which was the central feature and perhaps the justification of the Empire, or to yield to it, thus ending the Empire itself. They chose the latter course. Self-government, especially in its parliamentary form, was accepted as being the rational aim of political parties; the only difference between the British and the nationalists lay in whether the goal was far or near.<sup>1</sup> The popular assemblies, from being mere consultative bodies, turned into the repositories, at least in theory, of ultimate power.

### [ iii ]

The British Oriental civilization, then, flourished in its most characteristic form in the period of relaxation between the ending of the old Oriental systems of government and the gradual transfer of British power to the nationalist parties.

What were the features which at that time distinguished this civilization from that of the past or of other Asian countries?

It possessed the following characteristics or notes:

1. Law became sovereign. However gross may have been at times the travesty of criminal justice due to inefficiency of the courts or inappropriateness of their procedure, there was in fact the rule of law.

<sup>1</sup> Even a generation ago such progressive liberals as Lord Bryce and Lord Morley were writing that democratic government would for many decades be an impossibility in India.

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Law circumscribed the acts of government. From this came a protection of the individual greater than that found in many democratic states.

It is true that in times of commotion, government, especially its local officers, acted in a high-handed way and the ordinary freedoms were suspended. But these times were exceptional.

By law, all persons were equal in the eyes of the judge. In a society with such divisions as the Indian, this was perhaps not enough to establish equality as a fact. Nevertheless, the idea did spread that every individual, whatever his place in the social scale, had rights which were inviolable.

2. There was an intense political activity. If the nationalist parties are only to-day gaining actual power, they have for decades shackled the power of government. The Press, the new techniques of demonstration and agitation, were so many hooks with which they could pull the bureaucracy down from the clouds. Thereby was spread the concept of citizenship, in this form unknown until modern times in the East. If in British Asia there have seemed at times to be too many cooks shouting their advice, this has been the necessary stage in any society where large numbers of people have for the first time discovered that they are citizens.

Only as British rule drew to its close did some nationalists begin to favour some other forms of government than the parliamentary or genuinely democratic.

3. In spite of this popular activity, the British Asiatic civilization differed from the political civilization in the British Isles or the Dominions by the failure to link government and people in unity and trust. In India, Burma, Ceylon, government, if regarded on the one hand by long tradition as a kind of paternal protector, was also the object of the same hatred, suspicion and fantasy which according to Freudian psychology children often feel towards their fathers. Perhaps the British might have done more than they did to change the demeanour of government. But if the British did not make government popular, they permitted what was unthinkable in the Oriental states of the past, an organized, legalized opposition.

4. Life was regarded as a thing valuable in itself. Bloodlessness was a kind of cult; nor do such occasional bloody incidents as the massacre of Amritsar in 1919 disprove this, for such violence on the part of government has been as seldom as it was startling. The military arm was always subordinate to the civil arm. British power was exercised with its arms disguised, and in peace-time a soldier was

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seldom seen in most parts of India, Burma, Malaya or Ceylon. One reason for conciliatoriness lay, of course, in the very small size of the white force ever at the disposal of government, but here also liberal principle was at work.

5. Personal values were stressed as opposed to State values. The assumption was that the citizen should live as a normal human being and that the political temperature should be kept low. Heroic aims were at a discount. If it were desired to express in a nutshell the exact opposite of the outlook of the British administrator, could anything be found better than this sentence of Nietzsche: 'We must learn to sacrifice many people, and to take our cause seriously enough not to spare mankind?'<sup>1</sup> This cool attitude, radiating from government, chilled indeed the generous minds of the country, and contributed to the sense of frustration which was the chief political disease of British Asia.

Nevertheless in this atmosphere, one very valuable practice developed; and this was to apply the ordinary standards of morality to acts of State. Who can question that, sensitive as were the religions of the East to the value of the individual soul, the political practice in most Oriental countries had been rough and ready and only moderately influenced by religious idea? Living often more or less in a state of siege, traditional governments had been unable to be scrupulous. But in the British period it began to be assumed that governments were bound by moral rules not essentially different from those of individuals.

There have been other important ideas and presuppositions of political life in British territory, all more or less novel in the Orient. There has been the discovery that the pattern of the State can be regulated by a constitution. There has been the discovery that by means of law the organization of society can be changed by human will, and that man is therefore far more able to control his destiny than was formerly supposed. And there has been the cult of revolution, also a novelty; it has become accepted that it is normal to find in every country a kind of political priesthood of revolutionaries dedicated to conspire for the periodical blowing-up of society.

<sup>1</sup> In an essay on Alfred de Vigny, John Stuart Mill makes this comment on the matter-of-factness of the Victorian political outlook. 'For politics, except in connection with wordly advancement, the Englishman keeps a bye-corner of his mind. It is but a small minority among Englishmen who can comprehend that there are nations among whom politics, or the pursuit of social well-being, is a passion as intense, as absorbing, influencing as much the whole tendencies of the character, as the religious feelings or those of worldly interest.'

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The civilization produced a new type of human being—British Oriental Man—just as the Roman Empire produced its own standard type of man. And as in Rome citizens shared in the Roman qualities to a greater or less degree, so in the British Empire; the Indian and the Ceylonese were metropolitan man, the Burmese the provincial man, the Malays the frontier man. The qualities of the type when fully developed were indeed very much like those of the responsible British citizen; he was energetic but incurious, spoke good English, valued words, was Philistine in the other arts, admired self-reliance and suspected the government of the worst intentions.

One other feature must be noticed. The civilization, like that of the Roman Empire, was an urban one. The townsman flourished—most, often drawing his wealth, like the citizen of Roman Asia, from an exploitation of the peasantry which the peace and institutions of the Empire made more thorough than in the past. It is true that new institutions and new economic trends changed the life of the peasant; but by no stretch of interpretation can it be said that the farmers entered on a new high culture, though of course they benefited from the universal peace.

Such was the civilization of British Asia. It had many defects. Government may have abdicated its authority too far. Its slowness in providing education and health services was to the public disadvantage. Society was left too much to the buffets of economic blasts; and the suffering which this caused, described above in the case of India and Burma, has to be set off against the benefits of freedom. Such action as was taken by government had tended indeed to destroy the old social order and to resolve it into a collection of individuals who were thus rendered the less able to look after themselves. Modern anthropologists say that man is happiest when he is functioning as a member of a group and that the disease of modern life is that the individual is not properly adjusted to the group. If this is so, Great Britain has helped to spread the disease in the East.

Yet the merits of the system are not to be lightly treated. For the first time in centuries the heaviness of government had been lifted from society, which had thus been given the chance to evolve something new from its own resources. The individual had been given his head; and if new ideas were not engendered, at least all the popular ideas from the outer world were adopted.

Freedom without self-government had meant also freedom without some of its usually attendant evils. 'The one pervading evil of democracy', wrote Lord Acton, 'is the tyranny of the majority.' But while

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the British held power, minorities were free as never before. In these conditions they may indeed have developed characteristics which made it very difficult that they should ever live agreeably with the majorities. Yet the degree of the well-being of minorities has always been a good clue to the worth of a civilization.

[ iv ]

Some observers, while not denying the qualities described above, some good, some bad, would say that the significant facts about the Empire were not its political life or organization, but its economic system; and that this was one of imperialist exploitation. The pomp, philosophy and idealist protestations of the Empire which diversified its drabness are in their eyes merely a façade hiding the extraction from colonial labour of what a Marxist would call their surplus value.

It has been suggested that in India at least a joint British-Indian commission should be set up to try to discover what were the true facts; but the difficulty is to determine the truth. With facts so genuinely hard to interpret and so temptingly easy to distort, no agreed conclusion is likely ever to be reached. Certainly the motives of the British in maintaining their vast police mission in Asia were very mixed, and economic advantage was undeniably one. Legends abound, such as of the East India Company having run through Bengal like the barber in *Struwpeter* cutting off the thumbs of Indian weavers in order to prevent their competing against the Company's textile imports. Such stories may be absurd, but few advocates would enjoy defending the British mercantile record of the late eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any lack of criticism in England. Sheridan remarked that the East India Company wielded the truncheon with one hand, while with the other it picked a pocket; the Company, he said combined the meanness of a pedlar with the profligacy of a pirate. Half a century later when the English in the Orient were believed to have reformed themselves, a *Times* correspondent said of the commercial men in India that many had lived so long among Asiatics as to have imbibed their worst feelings and to have forgotten the sentiments of civilization and religion; they were as cruel as Covenanters without their faith and as relentless as Inquisitors without their fanaticism. Political power was certainly used at times to keep conditions favourable for British trade as long as

<sup>1</sup> The exploitation was worst in Bengal, and its memory is said to account for the racial feeling there still being stronger than in other provinces of India.

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possible; and, perhaps even against true British interest, at one time to delay the industrialization of the East.

Certain facts on the other side must, however, be remembered. Against every clear example of exploitation, it is possible to find some economic benefit which the East would not have enjoyed but for the British connection. The economic development of the countries offsetting the so-called 'drain' from them of payment on capital;<sup>1</sup> the undoubted cheapness of the administration; the control by government of the European business men; the transfer of the entire cost of naval defence to Great Britain and the relatively low defence budgets made possible by British power and policy; the vast saving represented by the complete internal tranquillity—all these would need to be balanced in the elaborate and indeed impossible sum of economic arithmetic to discover whether the East had materially benefited or suffered from the British connection. Indeed perhaps the heaviest complaint against Great Britain might be that its capitalists had been neither daring nor adventurous enough, and had neglected many of the opportunities of developing the resources of their Empire.<sup>2</sup>

### [ v ]

The bane of the British civilization was to disintegrate society: to cause neurosis.

From society in this state, revolution often results.

In a novel of Dostoevsky, a revolutionary leader, in a society demoralized in a rather similar way, explains his plans, and fore-shadows what actually took place in Russia:

'Do you know that we are tremendously powerful already? Our party does not consist only of those who commit murder and arson.

<sup>1</sup> Much capital was lost in unsuccessful ventures, as, for example, in Malaya. This must be set against the high returns in successful ventures.

<sup>2</sup> To acquit the British of economic exploitation would not be to say that their economic policies had been wise or enterprising. For example, the economic condition of India just before the war hardly made a very inspiring picture. After a brisk start with state economic activity at the middle of the last century, the Government of India seemed overcome with lassitude or complacency. But its achievement can be underrated. Its enterprise in irrigation has been described so often that the world is tired of the subject, but is none the less extraordinary. A recent report of the Central Board of Irrigation, in India, shows that India leads the world in that art, and that the area irrigated annually exceeds seventy million acres, this being more than the combined total in the United States of America, Russia, Mexico, Japan, Egypt, Spain, Italy, France, Chile, and Java. The percentage of area irrigated to the total area of the country is also higher in India than in any other country.

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Listen. A teacher who laughs with children at God is on our side. The juries who acquit every criminal are ours. The prosecutor who trembles at a trial for fear he should not seem advanced enough is ours. Among officials and literary men we have lots, lots, and they don't know it themselves. On all sides we see vanity puffed up out of all proportion; brutal, monstrous appetites. Do you know how many we shall catch by little ready-made ideas? When I left Russia, the dictum that crime was insanity was all the rage; I come back and I find that crime is no longer insanity but simply a gallant protest. But these are only the first-fruits. Oh, this generation has only to grow up. What a pity there's no proletariat. But there will be, there will be; we are going that way.

'Well, and there will be an upheaval. There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before. Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, and the earth will weep for its old gods.'

This character might have felt quite at home in India, Ceylon or Burma at the time when the British were laying down their power. Would the successors to the British change this state of mind and heal the neurosis before it caused an upset in South Asia similar to that which had happened in Russia?







## INTRODUCTION



## RUSSIAN EMPIRE

The British Empire in Asia never put forward any appeal which overtrumped nationalism. Thus, when national movements reached a certain force, and the British Government decided, wisely, not to try to repress them forcibly, the Empire had either to break up or (the better alternative) to be converted into a Commonwealth of equal States.

The other principal western empire in Asia, the Russian, had a different history. For in the Russian Empire after the revolution a new ideal was invented which had a rival appeal to nationalism—the set of ideas summed up in Communism. It is true that Communism has repelled as well as attracted; and it may be that the Asiatic subjects of Russia do not obey the Soviet Government as readily as is supposed. Nevertheless in the Soviet Union nationalism has not been the same disruptive force as ended the British Asiatic Empire. Communism, or at least the belief in the Russian Government as the champion of material progress, set up a countervailing force of unity. The rise of nationalism did not end the control of Moscow on its Asian dependencies.

The Russian Empire did not come into being with the Bolshevik Revolution. It has a history about half as long as the British Empire in Asia. For the study of modern Asia, its history is no less important.



## CHAPTER ONE



# THE TSARS IN ASIA

[i]

Besides Britain, another European power in the nineteenth century expanded its authority over Asia. The advance of Russia into that continent, as fateful as the spread of the Anglo-Saxon peoples into North America and due perhaps to show all its consequences for the world only at the end of another century or more, began later than the British advance and was more leisurely. Because of its slowness, it appeared to some more permanent; a province once annexed to Russia remained annexed, but an Asiatic province of the British Empire expected always to regain its freedom ultimately.

The British Empire in its whole compass fell into two halves. The first was the empty lands of America, Australia and South Africa which were colonized by Anglo-Saxon people and became the self-governing Dominions; the second the ancient and settled territories into which the British came as administrators but not as settlers. Similarly the Russian Empire in Asia had also two divisions. Siberia, the whole of which Russia had occupied by the mid-nineteenth century, was a more or less empty land suitable for colonization and resembled Canada or Australia. On the other hand, the steppe lands and Khanates of central Asia were ancient lands and thus resembled the Asiatic parts of the British Empire.

Certain parallels between the British government in India and the Tsarist government in European Russia have already been noticed, but it is instructive to study also what the Tsars and their successors accomplished as an imperial power in Asia, and that in circumstances so similar to those which faced the British.

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Russian expansion into Asia was a riposte, for Russia, existing first in the nuclear form of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, had for centuries before been on the defensive against Asia. During the later Middle Ages it was the tributary of the Empire of the Mongols based on the Volga river, the successors of Jenghiz Khan. Even when freed from that and beginning to devour slowly in its turn the Eastern territories from which it had been overawed, it still had to the south, occupying lands which seemed naturally Russian, the Empire of the Ottoman Turks.

The history of its effective expansion begins, like that of some other great movements, with a forgery. This was of a Testament of Peter the Great; but the forgery was made not by Russians but by their enemies. The document, alleged to have been stolen from the archives in St. Petersburg by the Chevalier d'Eon, a French officer in Russian service, and given by him to Louis XV, appeared first in a book published in Paris in 1812 by a propagandist of the Emperor Napoleon. In the testament Peter exhorts his heirs to keep as their persistent aim the spread of Russian power over the Asiatic continent. It was to begin with the subjection of Persia, the penetration to the Persian Gulf, and the re-establishment of the trade of the Levant, and to end with the advance to the Indies, which are described as the treasure house of the world. By this fabrication it was intended to frighten other countries at the Russian ambition, and several thousand copies of the book were taken on the Russian campaign by the propagandist staff of Napoleon. Once current, it enjoyed a stubborn life, like other forgeries such as the Protocol of the Elders of Zion, and flourished especially whenever French and Russian relations were strained. In 1836 an historical novelist, a collaborator of Dumas, produced what he claimed were the memoirs of the Chevalier d'Eon, giving fresh details about the Testament; in 1839 a Polish author added the exact circumstances in which Peter—in his tent after the Battle of Pultava—had written it; and the legend was added to during the Crimean War.

The document, though a forgery, was an intelligent anticipation. The Empress Catherine had ended the danger from the Turks; the Tsar Paul at the start of the nineteenth century ordered in a kind of futurist vision an expedition against India; in 1804 Russia began seriously to threaten Persia; under Nicholas I it established firmly its rule in the hitherto independent Caucasus, which was to be the base for its grand advance to the centre of the Asiatic continent. Thereafter it maintained a pressure on all the lands on its Asiatic frontiers,

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moving forward as if driven by an inner energy which would not let it rest until it reached the boundary of a strong neighbour on which it could repose. And no such boundary lay in fact in the barren lands between its own outposts and those of the outposts of the far-away British Empire in Asia. For nearly a century the Russian drive was continuous. A rhythm has been detected by which its outward pressure swayed first towards Europe—for Russia was also expanding over the Slavonic countries and towards Constantinople—then back to Asia, and then to Europe again, according to where it met currently the least resistance.

### [ ii ]

The first Russian moves towards Central Asia had been little more than the accepting of the transfer of allegiance of Moslem princes from the Mongol to the Russian Empire, by which Russia quietly inherited part of the realm of Jenghiz Khan, and the taking up by Russians of the steppe lands of the nomads. How this was contrived among a tribe called the Bashkirs is shown in a novel of the last century by the writer Aksakoff.

‘If tales were true, you had only to invite a dozen of the native Bashkir chiefs in certain districts to partake of your hospitality: you provided two or three fat sheep, for them to kill and dress in their own fashion; you produced a bucket of whisky, with several buckets of strong fermented Bashkir mead and a barrel of home-made country beer—which proves by the way that even in old days the Bashkirs were not strict Muhammedans—and the rest was as simple as A.B.C. It was said, indeed, that an entertainment of this kind might last a week or even a fortnight: it was impossible for Bashkirs to do business in a hurry, and every day it was necessary to ask the question, “Well, good friend, is it time now to discuss my business?” The guests had been eating and drinking, without exaggeration, all day and all night; but, if they were not completely satisfied with the entertainment, if they had not had enough of their monotonous singing and playing on the pipe, and their singular dances in which they stood up or crouched down on the same spot of ground, then the greatest of the chiefs, clicking his tongue and wagging his head, would answer with much dignity, and without looking his questioner in the face: “The time has not come; bring us another sheep!” The sheep was forthcoming as a matter of course, with fresh supplies of beer and spirits; and the tipsy Bashkirs began again to sing and dance,

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dropping off to sleep wherever they felt inclined. But everything in the world has an end; and a day came at last when the chief would look his host straight in the face and say: "We are obliged to you, *bàtyushka*, ever so much obliged! And now, what is it that you want?" The rest of the transaction followed a regular fashion. The customer began with a shrewdness native to your true Russian: he assured the Bashkir that he did not want anything at all; but, having heard that the Bashkirs were exceedingly kind people, he had come to Ufa on purpose to form a friendship with them, and so on. Then the conversation would somehow come round to the vast extent of the Bashkir territory and the unsatisfactory ways of the present tenants, who might pay their rent for a year or two and then pay no more and yet continue to live on the land, as if they were its rightful owners; it was rash to evict them, and a lawsuit became unavoidable. These remarks, which were true enough to the facts, were followed by an obliging offer to relieve the kind Bashkirs of some part of the land which was such a burden to them; and in the end whole districts were bought and sold for a mere song. The bargain was clinched by a legal document, but the amount of land was never stated in it, and could not be, as it had never been surveyed. As a rule the boundaries were settled by landmarks of this kind: "from the mouth of such and such a stream as far as the dead beech-tree on the wolf-track, and from the dead beech-tree in a bee-line to the watershed, and from the watershed to the fox-earths, and from the fox-earths to the hollow tree at Soltamratka", and so on. So precise and permanent were the boundaries enclosing ten or twenty or thirty thousands desyatinas of land! And the price of all this might be one hundred roubles and presents worth another hundred, not including the cost of the entertainments.<sup>1</sup>

The principal nomads on the route to Central Asia were, however, not the Bashkirs but the Kazaks, or, as they were in the nineteenth century incorrectly called, the Kirghiz. These were divided among themselves into two Hordes. The Lesser Horde had towards the end of the eighteenth century voluntarily asked for Russian protection. Then in the 'sixties of the last century the entire Kirghiz Steppe, lying between Siberia and the River Jaxartes, was made effectively a part of the Russian Empire.

<sup>1</sup> The Bashkirs at an earlier period made several revolts against the Russians, some of them which were suppressed with great savagery. On one occasion the whole of the high Bashkir aristocracy was invited to a feast and afterwards thrown into the freezing river through a hole in the ice. It is said that government policy at one time was to encourage eminent Bashkirs to drink themselves to death.

## THE TSARS IN ASIA

[ iii ]

Passing beyond this steppe Russia came in touch, no longer with nomads, but with more settled peoples organized in regular Islamic states. These were the three Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand. They were the heart of the Islamic world of Central Asia, the succession states built by Uzbek princes out of the shattered fifteenth-century Empire of Timur. They included Turcomans, Kalmuks, Kazaks, Uzbeks, Persians, Chinese, Hindus, Jews and Armenians, and were the great markets for tea, gold cloth, shawls, opium, books and metal-work. They contained some of the most celebrated centres of Islamic religion and learning and were thus of interest to all the Moslem world. The Amir of Bokhara bore the title of 'Bow Bearer of the Caliph of Rum', that is, of the Ottoman Sultan.

Since the achievements of an empire must be judged in the light of what it superseded, the nature of the Khanates deserves study. The governments of the Khans were typical of the Islamic civilization which throughout parts of Asia and parts of Africa was being overthrown or transformed by the western powers. Before their surrender they were described by a succession of English and other visitors in the early nineteenth century. Matthew Arnold's *Sick King in Bokhara* is a side-light on the popular interest they aroused.

The most remarkable of the visitors was the Reverend Joseph Wolff who in 1844 made a journey to try to rescue two English agents, Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly. These, in the haphazard method of Oriental diplomacy of the time, had been sent by the Government of India on a half-official mission; imprisoned by the Khan, they had been left by that government to their fate. Whether Stoddart or Conolly were alive or dead caused a public interest not unlike that in our day over the fate of the explorer, Colonel Fawcett in Brazil: and both events excited a memorable book from their wouldbe rescuers. The son of a Jewish rabbi, Wolff was born in 1795 in Germany. He left his home because he desired to become a Christian, was received into the Catholic Church in 1812, and studied Oriental languages at Rome as a pupil of the College of Propaganda; from this he was expelled for erroneous opinions. Thereupon he joined the Church of England, and became in alternating periods a country parson and a missionary calling himself the Apostle of Our Lord Jesus Christ for Palestine, Persia, Bokhara and Balkh. He attracted the friendship of odd characters of the time such as Sir Charles Napier, the Joshua-like Commander-in-Chief in India, and



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Drummond, the Irvingite and one of the more engaging eccentric members of Parliament. At one time he devoted himself to the discovery of the lost ten tribes of Israel, but his principal passion was the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, especially those in the more inaccessible places. Convinced that most of the world was leagued against him, he saw marvels and dangers everywhere he went.

Wolff's account of Bokhara, borne out by other witnesses, is of a state where the Amir had allowed his debauchery to overstep the usual limit imposed by custom, where there was the confusion usual to Oriental monarchies of this kind, but where the mass of the people were not ground down with exceptional severity, the government's inefficiency giving them a certain protection. If justice was harsh, it was often evaded. The local chieftains, the begs, were kept in check by the Amir. Spies were a principal instrument of government; every letter in and out of Bokhara was intercepted and read by the Amir himself. The Amir never moved without being accompanied by his whole army, for only when it was under his eye could he be sure of its loyalty. The past still lived. 'People conversed about Tamerlaine as though he were dead but yesterday. I also heard that Jenghiz Khan had a Jew from Germany as his secretary. They preferred in general Tamerlaine to Jenghiz Khan.'

Ultimately Wolff was allowed to depart. His final words are significant:

'There is the impression, from the Dardanelles to the Oxus, and from there to the utmost boundaries of Tibet that England and Russia shall be conquerors of the world, and the people are not dissatisfied with it, but, on the contrary, wish that even may soon take place.'<sup>1</sup>

### [ iv ]

For the Khanates, that event did soon take place. Russia had made a badly planned expedition against Khiva in 1839; the disaster it suffered was a miniature parallel of the catastrophe which befell the British expedition to Afghanistan at the same time. In the 'sixties Russia advanced in earnest; the Khanates brought on their destruc-

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the Bokharans had no illusions about Russia. A traveller a little before Wolff had written: 'Bokharans say, "Look at the Russians in Bokhara, at their life, liberty and comfort, and compare it with the black bread and unrelenting tyranny which they experience in their native land". Last, not least, they referred to their cruel banishment to Siberia which they spoke of with shuddering horror, and stated that on some occasions it had driven Russians voluntarily to betake themselves to Bokhara.'

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tion by their levies on Russian traders, and by permitting, or proving themselves unable to prevent, attacks by their tribal subjects on Russian caravans. That they had survived so long was because the Russian Government, advancing towards Central Asia, trenched on the British sphere of influence and proceeded with caution and a certain amount of duplicity. When it launched the attack on the Khanates, it represented it as having been made by local commanders without authority, and these were recalled but at the same time rewarded. The campaigns, it was said, were due to St. Anne's fever—the fever of officers to be decorated with the St. Anne's Cross.

Thus the pre-Bolshevik Russian Empire took shape. Kokand was annexed by Russia outright. Parts of Bokhara and Khiva, including the famous town of Samarkand, 'Paradise of the World', were also annexed. Though what remained of these states was left with a nominal independence, they were thenceforward bound to Russia in treaties of subordinate alliance rather like those of the Indian States with the British Crown. The expansive thrust ended in the 'eighties with the subjection of the last of the wild Turcoman tribes in the lands east of the Caspian Sea.

### [ v ]

As Russia rolled slowly forward, its advance caused alarm and counter-maœuvre in the British Empire. Even the most matter-of-fact of the British seemed to see the beginning of an Anglo-Russian combat for supremacy in Asia; and in Kipling's time the army officers in India thought of Cossacks as the established enemy just as those in England saw the French or German armies. But the century passed without open war. Distances between the bases of the Russian and British armies were so immense, the means of transport still so limited, that each country had room to hit about it without actively coming into conflict. Central Asia was a kind of giant cotton-wool, absorbing and muffling blows. Moreover the great powers in the nineteenth century feared the consequences of hostilities between them, and did not regard Asia, in spite of its riches and lure, as worth the price. During the Crimea War the British seem deliberately to have avoided carrying hostilities into Asia, as they might have done advantageously, especially in the Caucasus. They were, in fact, blamed for their caution by those in India who favoured a forward policy.

Bloodless conflict, however, there was in plenty. On each side the government gave licence to its agents to plot and counterplot to the

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limit of causing an actual explosion, and a kind of game grew up with recognized though unadmitted conventions. Struggles of this kind—for diplomatic influence and vantage points—are familiar in history. The combat was fought out partly over the control of the intervening states, especially Persia and Afghanistan, and the position of these has been compared to that of Armenia in the century-long struggle in antiquity between the Roman and Persian Empires.

## CHAPTER TWO



# TSARIST ADMINISTRATION

[ i ]

**T**he lands for which Russia, as a result of its conquests, had to provide or supervise the administration fell into two halves. One part, the earliest conquered, was the steppe country of the Kazaks, a prairie land like much of South Russia. Its inhabitants were chiefly nomads. Its beauty at certain times of the year when it is covered with wild tulips, poppies and geraniums excited the Russian lyrical feeling for wide landscapes. The other half, the territories which had belonged to the Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand, was desert intersected with very rich oases. Here was scenery which was the quintessence of what the Moslem East has meant for the European imagination. Walled towns, gardens hidden behind high enclosures, a mixed Turk and Mongol population sombre in expression but dressed in Joseph-like striped coats, camels, donkeys, abundance of fruit—melons, peaches, apricots—dust, sand, beggars and pariah dogs—such have been the oasis cities for centuries. ‘Silken raiment, stores of rice, grape syrup, squares of coloured ice.’ Visitors remarked that houses, mosques, palaces all seemed to be crumbling, and that everywhere were broken potsherds. Probably even at the most prosperous periods most of these towns have seemed ever since their foundation to be in decay, so unremitting has been the counter-offensive of the desert against the civilization which they supported.

[ ii ],

The political systems which Russia set up were of two kinds. One was in the area annexed outright to the Russian Empire and

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directly administered; this was as large as Germany and Italy combined. The other was the still nominally independent Khanates of Bokhara and Khiva over which Russia exercised a protectorate like that of the British Government over the Indian States.

The Tsarist achievement in Asia fell in historical significance below that of the British in the same century, or that of their Bolshevik successors two or three generations later, because the Tsars never transformed the life of Central Asia in the sense of introducing a new civilization. Their regime was little more than a colonial police one, though by later standards the police was surprisingly mild. Nevertheless, their administrative institutions were often interesting, and sometimes more enlightened than those which the British fostered.

At the beginning of their expansion, the Russians had been more naïve and more benevolent in intention than were the British in their corresponding period when they were setting up an administration in their first footholds in India. When in the false dawn of Russian enlightenment under Catherine II the first Kazak nomads were brought under Russian rule, the philanthropic rationalists whom the fashion of the times had promoted in her court looked upon them as deserving and unfortunate children. A man was a nomad because he was unfortunate enough to be ignorant. He did not eat bread—because he did not know its taste. He did not till fields—because he had not thought of a plough. He froze in the winter—because he did not understand carpentry. He allowed his cattle to perish—because he had not heard of sheds. The government of Catherine issued a code of regulations for the territory in which altruistic sensibility is matched with administrative absurdity. Officers were instructed to teach the nomads the use of bread, hay-cutting and simple trades. The Christian Russian government built for them Moslem mosques, and only much later did it discover that these people had been not Moslem but Shamanistic, and that the funds of the Christian government had thus been used to convert the heathen to Islam.

The nomads disappointed their benefactors. They continued to pillage Russian caravans. A more military form of government was therefore reverted to. But when in the 'sixties the Russians passed in their conquests from the steppe region to the oases of Central Asia, and had to deal with settled rather than nomadic peoples, and with an ancient civilization, their administrative problem changed in nature and became similar to that which had faced the British in India when they became heirs to the Moghuls.

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[ iii ]

The new administration seems to have been built with little knowledge of or interest in the British system in India. This was the more surprising because to the traveller in British and Russian Asia there were strong outward likenesses in the two areas. The material things most obvious to the eye were often the same. But the central spring of society was differently organized. The contrasts are instructive.

In India the new law and the law courts revolutionized social relationships throughout the country, even though the British in setting them up had not intended that this should happen; the Russians on the other hand, while introducing modern courts for graver offences, kept intact to a much greater extent the old law and the indigenous courts.<sup>1</sup>

The British, by imposing western ideas of land-ownership and land taxation, stamped out or reduced whole classes of proprietors and created new ones; the Russians remained content far longer with the haphazard fiscal system inherited from their predecessors, nor did they, like the British in their early days, strain the economic life by overbearing tax demands.

The British sowed the dragons' teeth of schools and universities, and opened Oxford and Cambridge to their Asiatic subjects; in Russian Asia, education was left to the mullahs, and no student class grew up, poverty-stricken but panting to change their society into a copy of that of the West.

The British built in India a standing native army of about a quarter of a million; the Russians of two battalions.

The British shone at irrigation; the Russians at road-building.

The British government, in spite of the English tradition of local government, neglected and in some places virtually crushed the village self-government; the Russians, who were supposedly dedicated to autocratic government, introduced from the first an elective system into local administration; and though elections were usually manipulated by the civil servants, the attachment by the Russians to the system was none the less peculiar.

In one respect the Russian and British policies were alike, and that was in religious toleration and in the discouragement of all zeal by Christian missionaries. So far was this carried that in both Empires

<sup>1</sup>A curious innovation was the attempt to set up elected judges in the native courts.

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the Christian rulers were at times censured by Moslems for indifference to their own Christian religion.

[ iv ]

The other part of the Russian sphere, the Khanates of Bokhara and Khiva—or what was left of them after the cessions they were compelled to make—kept their autonomy, and Russian control over their domestic matters was less than that of the Indian Government over the Indian States. No Russian Resident was present continuously at their capitals. The Khans neglected even to extirpate slavery from their states, though they had bound themselves to do so, nor did they stop gruesome public executions. Away from the capitals, government was often carried on by local magnates or begs. One of these is described as habitually taking with him on tour all his archives, old trophies such as blunderbusses and lances, a stuffed tiger, a museum of gifts received from foreign visitors, his harem, a large collection of saddles, robes, guns, pistols, mirrors, chests, bottles and books, and all the prisoners in his custody.

[ v ]

Such were the policies and institutions of the Russian system ; but these give perhaps a picture rather more pleasing than was the reality. Central Asia at that time, unlike to-day, was accessible to visitors ; there is an abundant literature of the impression of travellers ; all speak of a low quality of the administrative personnel. There was a raffish and frontier atmosphere. The Russians made no attempt to form a cadre of civil servants devoted to colonial administration such as the Indian Civil Service or the Colonial Civil Service of the British Empire ; they drew their administrators from the services of the rest of the Empire and from the army. The man who had failed in the civil service in St. Petersburg, the army officer whose wildness had made his regiment too hot for him, came for rehabilitation to Central Asia, and the way of advance was through faction and intrigue. Few civil officers troubled to understand the native language, customs or history. Corruption at least equalled that of the early days of British rule in India ; the bureaucracy swelled beyond all needs ; a Forestry Department was created where there were no trees ; to eke out their pay all ranks of the army would sometimes undertake private economic enterprise. A lack of pedantry about the law also resulted in the

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law being often brushed clean aside, admirable though the checks and regulations of the government may have been in theory. And if these were the shortcomings of the early days of the administration, and if improvement took place later in the century, one canker, the bad blood between the army and the civilian administration, seems to have continued until the end of Tsarist days.

Russian rule was not, however, unpopular. That the regular garrison of the vast area was no more than 50,000 Cossacks is sufficient proof. There were only two revolts of any consequence. If one reason for passivity was that Russian force, if provoked, was used with ruthlessness, another was that the Russian rule did not seem intolerable. Lacking in colour prejudice, tolerant if erratic, human if often wildly inhuman, taking up local habits and often even wearing local dress, the Russians gradually broke down the first prejudice against them. Though they did not foster a native professional class, as did the British in India, they treated as equals the few Moslems who by their own initiative westernized themselves and entered Russian service. Several of their most distinguished officers bore Asiatic names thinly Russianized: Yusupoff was Yussuf, Alikhanoff was Ali Khan. No mass influx of Russians imperilled the livelihood or land of the local inhabitants. The Russians avoided excessive offence and did not feel themselves impelled to extreme reforms. In fact the chief contrast of the Tsarist and British Empires in Asia is that, while the British, whether by design or not, set going a great revolution in Oriental society, under Tsarist rule people did not feel uprooted or that the world was in a whirl. They had their rule of life as formerly and a pattern lay before them in which to walk. There was no new and ambitious middle class. No restless intelligentsia developed among the Uzbeks or Turcomans. Even the newspapers which began to flourish devoted at one time much of their space to the reprinting of tales from the *Arabian Nights*.



## CHAPTER THREE



# BOLSHEVIK ASIA

[ i ]

**T**he uprooting of the old life in Russian Asia, delayed longer than in British territory, was in the end carried out with greater zest. The Bolsheviks broke away from the languid and *laisser-faire* attitude of the Tsars, and repeated the performance of the British in the previous century in giving birth to a new Asiatic civilization, but one as different from the liberal one of the west as that had been from traditional Oriental life.

The Islamic society of Central Asia was set on its head. Though it had known slaughter again and again in its history—it had been the centre of the Empire of Timur—the change in its way of life which has taken place in the last three decades has caused probably more upset than any massacre of the past. What has happened is still regarded with awe by Moslem people on the Soviet borders.

[ ii ]

When the Tsarist Government fell in 1917, the ~~Khanates~~ of Bokhara and Khiva enjoyed a last brief independence. The Amir of Bokhara, in conjunction with Enver Pasha, the Young Turk leader who ended his strange career as a refugee in Central Asia and was killed there by Bolshevik troops, tried to restore the state of affairs of a hundred years earlier. There was a half-hearted effort to gain British protection. There was an outbreak of traditional methods of government. But as soon as the Bolshevik Government had established its position in European Russia, it carried out the step to which the Tsarist Government, but for the Great War, would have been eventually impelled and annexed the Khanates.

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To-day Soviet Central Asia consists of the four republics of Uzbekistan, Tadzikistan, Turkmenia and Kazakstan, constituent parts of the U.S.S.R. The news about them published by the Russian Government is of the building of railways, dams, factories, filatures, hospitals, schools, libraries, theatres. The information need not be doubted, and means that a radical change has taken place in all the conditions of life in the area.

Certain facts are clear.

The Soviets have done what the Tsars failed to do and what the British did in India a century ago. Out of the traditional Oriental society which included only begs, peasants, mullahs and merchants, they have raised a new class, the intelligentsia. This consists of teachers, doctors, engineers, civil servants, technicians of all kinds. It is the administrative class if not actually the governing class politically. And it consists partly of women, itself a change of the greatest consequence in Asiatic history.

The Soviet Government, in creating this middle class, improved on the British by capturing the imagination of those whom it had bred. The British, begetting a similar class, had turned it loose in the world with an education, with advice drawn from their own not very apposite nineteenth-century prophets, but with no aid in finding it an assured income or happy emotional life. The Russians, on the contrary, have provided their intelligentsia with a task which helps to keep them busy and therefore happy: in fact, they created the intelligentsia for the sake of the tasks. Having taken up the old grooves of life, the Russians have at once laid down new grooves on which the new generation moves fairly contentedly. Its destiny is to modernize and industrialize its ancestral lands. Worshipping the statistics of production, writing paeans to Stalin (until Stalin died), passing resolutions against class enemies and national enemies, it feels that it has a useful place in a world which, though still imperfect, is being improved by a timeless government.

The Russians claim, however, that an even greater contrast to what has happened in the British Empire is that in the Soviet Empire they have overcome the disruptive force of nationalism. They say that while Indian, Burmese, Ceylonese nationalisms caused the British Empire to fall apart, in the U.S.S.R. the government has harnessed the many local nationalisms in a single energy sustaining a single unified Empire. The peoples in Central Asia who are transforming their country largely for the use of the Soviet military machine are not Russians, speaking Russian as their native language, but Kazaks,

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Tadzik, Uzbeks and Turcomans. Their ancestors fought the Russians as the Sikhs and the Marathas fought the British; but these wars, it is argued, now seem like pre-history.

The cause of their success, the Russians say, is threefold.

The first is that the Soviet Union is a federation in which the nationalists, enjoying local autonomy, have been made to realize that the interest of each is best promoted by the union of all.

The second is that Communism is a kind of religion shared at least by the younger people of all the nations, Asiatic as well as Russian, and that in its service the national distinctions, while not discouraged, become irrelevant.

The third is that the central government has won the confidence of the peoples by promoting, and not by merely tolerating, the local nationalisms. Certainly the Soviet Press is never tired of applauding the revival of national dances, the research into local history, and the building of national theatres, or of discovering Turcoman Shakespeares and Tadzik Beethovens, geniuses who a hundred years ago would have been like the ocean gem or desert flower. Nor is there doubt that the Soviet Government, perhaps alone among actual governments, is undismayed by the multitude of languages spoken by its inhabitants, and encourages the study of the philological minutiae of each.

As proof of the success of its policies in winning the attachment of the people the Russian Government points to the fact that the Union held together under one of the greatest strains of war which any state could be tested by.

It is not easy to judge how far the picture thus given in official Russian propaganda is a true one. The official line about the 'nationalities' is constantly changing. Conflict over the question was one of the causes of the recent overthrow of Mr. Beria. Sometimes there has been an evident discouragement of too much 'cultural nationalism'.

The extent to which the U.S.S.R. is a genuine federation can easily be exaggerated. Even according to the constitutional law the central government has enormous powers. In practice they are unlimited. The central government controls the affairs of the units exactly to the extent which it considers desirable.

In estimating how far the Russians have succeeded in overcoming what they call the 'national tension', one device of the Russian State should not be forgotten. Although the national republics are governed by national soviets, whose members are their own nationals, there is behind these again another more powerful system of government.

## BOLSHEVIK ASIA

This is the Communist Party which throughout the length and breadth of Russia controls ultimately all Soviets, which is under central direction from Moscow, and which, though it contains members from all the nationalities, is chiefly a Great Russian organization. The Communist Party rules the policy of the country. The Communist Party can intervene in the least detail of its execution. Quite a large number of local politicians who had been independent in their ideas disappeared during the purges before the war. Thus in the Central Asian republics the supreme power to-day, no less than in the time of the Tsars, is in Russian hands, and the new intelligentsia if it holds administrative office is not a sovereign class.<sup>1</sup>

Whether there is in fact much resentment at this, whether the Russians are regarded as aliens, it is hard to find out. During the war, a surprisingly large number of Kazaks, taken prisoner by the Germans, seemed ready to fight against the Soviet. In Uzbekistan there was said to be complacency at the news of Russian disasters; old hints of transferring from the Russian to the British Empire began to circulate again. Moreover the Russian officials in their comments on Central Asians are apt to use expressions which hardly go with fraternal equality. Even Stalin in the post-war years expressed his suspicions with surprising frankness.

The most likely reading of the situation is that the people are divided, and while the privileged new middle class supports its creator, the mass of the people still believe, as most Oriental peoples have always believed, that all government, national or foreign, must be evil. A peasant people compelled to learn to run a mechanical civilization cannot escape suffering. It is the same story as in British Asia. The old life falls to pieces and all except a minority of the exceptionally adventurous suffer anguish like the uprooted mandrake. Soviet Asia is perhaps a good world for young men but not for the old. Once over a certain age a man seldom desires to change his life completely, and the Soviet world is too fast for the aged. They are unrespected by the young. What is taken from them is necessary for their happiness, and the benefits they receive are new toys which divert them only passingly. The mass transfers of population, a feature of Soviet rule, cannot but seem to the peoples affected a bitter wrong. They resent also the decline of their religion. The Soviets have from time to time taken action against Islam, turning mosques into clubs, and though

<sup>1</sup> There have recently been reports that in the actual administrative offices the Asiatic officials are being increasingly replaced by Great Russians. How far the reports are correct it is hard to discover.

## RUSSIAN EMPIRE

they have more recently given up this persecution, they have not yet reassured the pious Moslem that his religion is secure.

Thus secularized mullahs, nomads tied unwillingly to the soil, collectivized peasants rise up in accusation. If the action of the Soviet Government is judged by the amount of unhappiness it produces at the present rather than by the amount of happiness it is laying up for the future, the verdict upon it must be unfavourable.

It cannot, however, be denied that to the young and the underdog Russia has throughout the Asiatic world an appeal which it can lose only by mountains of wrong-doing, nor that the young and the underdog often prefer what Russia offers to any nationalist or religious appeal from its opponents. It has been said that the modern scholarly Englishman antagonizes the Oriental by expressing a reverent interest for all that is past and dead in the East but indifference to the present: the Russian, on the other hand, wins their regard because he is unimpressed by their ruins but interested in their schools, roads and hospitals. The drama in the Russian Empire is one of extremely gifted but socially and economically backward peoples struggling towards the most rapid material advance, and the Russian Government in leading them is unhampered by any fixed prejudices in favour of the rights of, or even common justice to, the individual man. This single-mindedness the East is likely to find sympathetic rather than the reverse.

From time to time I have witnessed the following: in Kandahar poor Moslems lamenting that they were too poor to buy wives but saying that if the Russians came they would receive the wives of the rich merchants; in Persia poor Assyrian Christians who said that prison in Russia was freer than freedom in Iran, and remembering with nostalgia the shower-baths they had enjoyed in Soviet concentration camps; in Syria, Moslem servants who threatened their masters with what would happen when Stalin came; in India, Communists who see in Russia their only protection against the plutocratic nationalists who have succeeded the British; in the Lebanon, the Arab Christians who see atheist Russia as their liberator; and throughout the Middle East Armenians and minorities who see Russia putting down the mighty from their seats. The triumph of the Russian revolution has been to spread throughout the Oriental world the conviction that society is insubstantial, and that all who are wealthy and powerful sit perilously and may fall to-morrow. The power expected to cause the crash and vengeance is Russia.

## BOLSHEVIK ASIA

[ iii ]

The turning into Soviet citizens of the Asiatic cultivators and nomads who had been brought under Russian rule by the arms of the Tsars is the great drama of modern Asia—as in the last century was the creation of an Indian bourgeoisie by the British. Its pathos has never been so well expressed as by Bertrand Russell who visited Russia in the first days of the revolution :

‘It was on the Volga, in the summer of 1920, that I first realized how profound is the disease in our Western mentality, which the Bolsheviks are attempting to force upon an essentially Asiatic population. Our boat travelled on, day after day, through an unknown and mysterious land. Our company was gay, noisy, quarrelsome, full of facile theories, with glib explanations of everything, persuaded that there is nothing they could not understand and no human destiny outside the purview of their system. One night very late our boat stopped in a desolate spot where there were no houses, but only a great sandbank, and beyond it a range of poplars. In silence I went on shore, and found on the sand a strange assembly of human beings, half nomad, wandering from some remote region of famine, each family huddled together surrounded by all its belongings, some sleeping, others silently making small fires of twigs. The flickering flames lighted up gnarled, bearded faces of wild men, strong, patient primitive women, and children as sedate and slow as their parents. Human beings they undoubtedly were, and yet it would have been far easier for me to grow intimate with a dog or a cat or a horse than with any one of them. I knew that they would wait there day after day, perhaps for weeks, until a boat came in which they could go to some distant place in which they had heard—falsely perhaps—that the earth was more generous than in the country they had left. To me they seemed to typify the soul of Russia, inexpressive, inactive from despair, unheeded by the little set of westernizers who make up all the parties of progress or reaction. It is possible, I thought, that the theorists may increase the misery of the many by trying to force them into actions contrary to their primeval instincts, but I could not believe that happiness was to be brought to them by a gospel of industrialism and forced labour. . . . And at last I began to feel that all politics are inspired by a grinning devil, teaching the energetic and quick-witted to torture subraissive populations for the profit of pocket, or power, or theory. As we journeyed on, fed by food extracted from the peasants, protected by an army recruited from among her sons, I wondered

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what we had to give them in return. But I found no answer. From time to time I heard their sad songs or the haunting music of the balalaika ; but the sound mingled with the great silence of the steppes, and left me with a terrible questing pain in which Occidental hopefulness grew pale.'

## PART THREE



## THE FUTURE





## CHAPTER ONE



1945

[i]

This was the year of transformation in South Asia, the end of one period, the beginning of another: a landmark like 1066 in English history, or in European history like 1453, the year in which Constantinople fell, or 1648, the year of the Peace of Westphalia.

The changes which began in 1945 and followed in quickening succession in the years afterwards had of course been in preparation for a long time. No great political or social upheaval comes out of a clear sky; the process by which events during a whole generation had been moving towards revolution has been described in the earlier part of this book. Yet as far as one year can ever be regarded as a water-shed, 1945 is a perfect example. On the far side stand the Western empires in Asia, majestic perhaps but relatively simple in their political and economic life. On the near side are the succession states, with their confused national movements and under the overhanging shadow of Communism.

The capital event was the liquidation—voluntary, rapid, and almost complete—of the British Empire in Asia. This began as soon as the war in Europe ended. At first sight it may seem a very strange consequence of the war.

Never before had Britain had so many troops in Asia. In India, always the centre of the British Asiatic Empire, the National Congress was weaker than for years past. During the war it had, by its 'open revolt', forced the British to respond by coercing it. It reeled under the not very heavy blows it received, and showed that its actual power in the country was less than had been believed. If the British had been bent with their whole minds on retaining their Empire,

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they might have found it possible to build up at least for a time a formidable union of interests ready to co-operate with them against Congress.

The British did not try to do so. They did not wish to do so. During the war they had pledged themselves to give freedom to India (and also to Ceylon). In July 1945 a Labour Government had been elected; and the Labour party had for a long while taken a special interest in India's emancipation, and some of its leaders were on terms of warm friendship with Congress leaders. British intellectuals had for years preached the moral wickedness and economic unsoundness of imperialism. They were now reinforced by the inferences drawn by the public from the collapse during the war in Malaya and Burma and the indifference of the people of these countries to British disaster. Must there not, it was asked, have been something very debilitating about British rule?

There were deeper motives in the country as a whole for acquiescing in the loss of Empire. Realists—on the conservative as well as the socialist side—saw that Oriental nationalism had become one of the elemental forces of the time, and was likely to increase in strength rather than diminish. To oppose it headlong was to be broken. Political wisdom lay in coming to an accommodation with it. Nationalism had made out of date the political structure described in the earlier part of this book under which so many millions had lived in peace. Whatever the merits of the old system, it was beyond the strength of Western powers to support it against the new stresses. The time had come for a new act of political architecture, the task being to create in the new age quite new political systems which would ensure peace as effectively as in the past. It was argued in Britain that if the British Government, of its own free will, surrendered to the nationalist parties without a fight, the task of political creation would be much easier. The ground would not be littered with ruin and debris. Moreover, Britain itself might be allowed, on a basis of equality, a hand and influence in the new construction which would otherwise have been vehemently denied.

How the understanding of the realities in the Orient had deepened was shown by the widespread acceptance of these views in Britain in 1945. Not even on the conservative side was there a belief that the old structures could still be kept intact, such as was widely held in the debates in parliament in the nineteen-thirties.

Outside Britain, the public in America held the same views as in England, and in a more extreme form. This prodded Britain on.

Many people had come to believe that the arguments used in the past against emancipation were exaggerated or hypocritical: the prophecies of what might happen if Western power was withdrawn were scoffed at.

In trying to find the ways of transferring its power in Asia, the British Government acted with a sense of urgency because of its doubts about the instruments by which in the last resort its power could be maintained. The enthusiasm against Empire had spread in the British army among both private soldiers and officers. Most of the troops had one chief wish: to return home and be demobilized as quickly as possible. Only a tactful visit to India by the Labour Secretary of State for War prevented some of the troops from mutinying.

If the British troops would have been undependable in any clash with Oriental nationalism, still more so the Indian army. Immediately after the war the Government of India held a series of trials of the leaders of the Indian National Army—the Indian prisoners of war who had joined the Japanese and had been organized into this separate force. Though found guilty, the accused officers were applauded as heroes—though a little tepidly—by Congress. The Government passed light sentences on them: it was clear from then on that it was no longer the certain master of the Indian army. The unity and loyalty of the army was also strained by the ever growing tension between Hindus, Moslems and Sikhs.

[ ii ]

In spite of all this willingness on the British side to end its rule in India, and in spite of the anxieties about what would happen if it did not do so, the transfer of power took two whole years. The problem was, as it had been for years, to whom should power be handed over. To Congress? But the Moslems objected fiercely, since this would mean Hindu rule. To a union of Congress and Moslem League? But they could not agree on the terms of co-operation.

Endless consultations by the Viceroy with the party leaders, a visit of a delegation from the British Parliament, a cabinet mission of Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick Lawrence and Mr. A. V. Alexander, the dramatic replacement of Lord Wavell as Viceroy by Lord Mountbatten: all these happened before a practicable plan could be made. When it was hatched out, in the summer of 1947, it provided, not for the freedom of India, but for freedom of two succession states, India and the new Moslem state of Pakistan.

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Pakistan was formed out of the predominantly Moslem areas of the Frontier, Sind, and the Western Punjab; and, on the other side of India, of the eastern part of the huge province of Bengal. The two parts of the country were divided by the main body of North India, and were a thousand miles apart.

Thus almost beyond belief, and (in spite of the frustrations in the period of actual negotiation) with astonishing rapidity, the movement for an independent Moslem homeland in the Indian sub-continent—the movement described earlier in this book—had come to almost complete success. The only limitation on the Moslem triumph was that the Moslem League would have liked Pakistan to be larger than it was. (The non-inclusion of Kashmir in the formal settlement was to have dangerous consequences.) Whether the separation of Pakistan and India could have been prevented will be argued for decades. In the negotiations between the British and the parties in 1946 and 1947 various alternative plans had been put forward for a loose federation which might have kept Hindus and Moslems together. At one time one of the plans seemed to be formally accepted by all: but agreement was upset at a crucial moment by the impetuosity of some of the Congress leaders, especially of Mr. Nehru (as it might have been later by the intransigence of the Moslems). Probably by the end of the war the Pakistan movement, whatever its origins, had passed over into being a genuine nationalist movement which could be gratified by nothing short of sovereign independence. To have stood in its way would have been to cause a terrible political flood. In yielding to the demand for Pakistan—in spite of all the consequences of a partition of India which were clearly foreseen—the British were at least acting consistently with their general policy of coming to terms with nationalism.

The coming into being of Pakistan was one of the principal results of the end of British rule in Asia. With eighty million people, Pakistan is the largest Moslem state in the world. Its birth was a major event.

### [ iii ]

With India independent, the end of the rest of the British Empire in Asia was a matter of course.

The liquidation outside India was relatively easy to arrange. Ceylon had always been the easiest of the Asian countries to handle. During the latter part of the war it had been the headquarters of the South-east Asia Command, as well as an important naval base. The

co-operation of the Ceylonese cabinet—or board of ministers—had been all that could be desired. In the summer of 1943 the British Government promised that at the end of the war there would be further constitutional reform which would result in ‘full internal civil administration’.

When this promise was made, the intention was that Britain would keep control over defence and foreign affairs. But in the post-war mood, this limitation was quickly set aside. The Ceylon parliament passed an Act conferring on Ceylon full dominion status; and though the Royal Assent was refused, dominion status was conferred in December 1947 by the Parliament at Westminster. The constitution for the Dominion, which had been drawn up during the war by the Ceylon board of ministers, was adopted by a new parliament which had been elected in 1946.

In Burma the difficulties had been a little greater. Towards the end of the war most of the more ambitious Burmese nationalists had turned against the Japanese; they had formed the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League which offered its co-operation to the Western allies. Lord Mountbatten, when commander-in-chief in south-east Asia, gave the leader of the League, Aung San, the hope that Burmese demands would be satisfied. The British governor of Burma, who returned from his war-time exile in India soon after the reconquest, damped some of these hopes. But on his replacement—in 1946—the plans for making Burma fully independent were rapidly carried out. A government was formed of popular leaders. A constituent assembly sat throughout 1947. The murder of Aung San and half his cabinet by rival nationalists—who belonged mostly to the section which had sided with Japan—did not hold up the advance. On 3rd January 1948 independence was proclaimed: the date had been carefully chosen by the astrologers as the most auspicious, though a minority party of the astrologers said that it had been selected by the wrong methods.

[ iv ]

The liquidation of the British Empire in Asia was accompanied by the virtual end of the Asian Empires of America, Holland and France.

America ended its overlordship in the Philippines for much the same reason as the British in their Asian territories. It had accepted the thesis that imperialism was wrong: for years it had been preparing the Philippines for freedom. But the settlement which it made

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with the Filipinos differed from that of Britain with India, for America retained, by treaty, military and naval bases in the Philippines which Britain never sought from India.

Unhappily the end of the Dutch Empire in Indonesia did not come about with the same harmony between the former rulers and their subjects. During the war the Dutch had been completely overthrown by the Japanese: nevertheless after the capitulation of Japan they tried to re-establish their authority almost unchanged. The country had changed too much for this to be possible. To serve their own purposes the Japanese, during their occupation, had set up a subordinate Indonesian administration. Just before the Japanese collapse, the Indonesian politicians had proclaimed, with Japanese connivance, an independent republic. They refused to submit to Holland.

For four years the Dutch tried to put them down by force and by building up rival native governments. But they failed. The delays in the re-entry of Dutch forces into Indonesia, the sympathy of India and Australia for the Indonesians, the intervention of the United Nations, Dutch maladroitness, above all the trends of the age, broke all the Dutch efforts. At the end of 1949 they accepted that Indonesia had made good its independence, and came to terms at a Round Table Conference at the Hague. They were lucky to salvage from their former Empire the fiction of a continuing union of the Netherlands and free Indonesia. And that fiction they quickly endangered by withholding from Indonesia the island of New Guinea—almost worthless economically—over which they had not lost military control.

The post-war history of the French Empire in Indo-China was in some ways similar to that of the Dutch, though whether it will end in the same way is still uncertain. Like Indonesia, Indo-China was occupied by the Japanese army. After Japan's defeat, it was occupied in the north by a Chinese Kuomintang army which patronized Annamite nationalism: and in the south at first by British forces. Some time went by before French troops were available in any quantity. In the confusion, an Annamite national party, the Viet Minh, was able to build up its strength and resist the return of the French.

The French refused to consider complete emancipation and to follow the British example in India. Negotiations for a kind of dyarchy between them and Viet Minh broke down; and in the struggle which followed the French were rather more successful than the Dutch in Indonesia. The Indo-China problem never went to the United Nations. The French managed to identify Viet Minh with

Communism, and thus won the sympathy and in the end the help of the United States. In Indonesia, America had sympathized with the Indonesians against the Dutch because it thought of it as a struggle of nationalism against imperialism; in Indo-China it supported the French against the Annamites because it thought of it as a struggle against Communism.

Though the French have so far kept a place for themselves in Indo-China, they have had to recast fundamentally its political structure. Three separate states have been constituted, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos, which have been recognized as autonomous though within the French Union. They are genuinely self-governing. The French have relinquished nearly all their administrative authority. Frenchmen and French business enjoy certain privileges; the French army continues to operate in the country; foreign policy is still controlled, though Viet Nam has its own diplomatic relations. But the Viet Nam government presses continually for fuller independence: and France, finding the war against Viet Minh the real impediment to its own economic recovery, wonders whether the position it enjoys in Indo-China is worth the price which it is paying in a terribly wasting war.

## [ v ]

Thus the picture in South Asia after 1945 was of the great empires splitting up into succession states. Nationalism had replaced imperialism.

In some ways the situation was very much like that in East Europe in 1919 after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and curtailment of the German and Russian Empires.

In Asia, nationalism had now to show whether it could be more politically creative than it had showed itself in Europe in the years between the wars. Could each of the succession states build up a stable system, with sufficient justice done to each powerful section or interest so that the disruptive tensions were kept at a minimum? Could the succession states organize among themselves an international system which would keep them from fighting one another?

Nationalism, though a very strong force, can usually overthrow more easily than it can create. For making a revolution, a talent of a certain kind is required, but for restoring ordered life after revolution the talents needed are different. The contrasts between revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods are described very well in the book by the late Mr. F. S. Oliver called *The Endless Adventure*. Oliver des-



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cribed the post-revolutionary leaders as 'salvage men' of politics. He wrote:

'During a revolutionary period an astute politician never attempts to put out the blaze. On the contrary, it may profit him to be seen busily pitching fuel on the bonfire. . . . Sooner or later the exaltation passes and the prevalent mood insensibly changes. . . . Post-revolutionary politicians are the salvage men of a revolution. Unless their common-place ambitions can find employment, everything is likely to be lost. The reason why revolutions that have failed are so many times more numerous than those which have succeeded is that the fanatics and theorists are apt to keep the upper hand until they have brought everything to ruin by their pedantic obstinacy and contempt for custom.'

By 1947 the struggle against British imperialism was over, and with it the romantic period of revolutionary agitation. The time had come for the salvage men. It was a period less heroic but deeply interesting, and one which was to decide the fate of very many millions of people.

In each of the countries freed by Britain, the heirs of the former imperial powers were a party or parties representing a minority of the population. They had to construct the instruments of power by which to maintain their authority. Some of these they could retrieve from the old system: some they had to build afresh.

They had to come to terms with rival parties and interests. They had to try to reform social and economic systems which were in general archaic (in spite of reformist policies by the imperial governments) and whose tensions were causing fresh political dangers. They had to win the loyalty of a rising generation thoroughly unsettled by the turmoil of the war, the struggle for freedom, and the impact of new ideas.

The price of failure would be further revolution. That has been the dominating fact in South Asia since 1945. The transformation which began then with the liquidation of the Western Empires might end in a new equilibrium: or else new revolutions might tread on the heels of the revolution already consummated.

Within two years of India becoming independent, the conditions in which it had to live were transformed, radically and unexpectedly, by the victory of Communism in China, and the revival of China as a great power. In consequence of this, Communism became, almost overnight, a most formidable challenger to all the nationalist parties of Asia. Chinese Communism, as distinct from Russian Communism, appeared to be an Asian movement, and, in its hue and cry against

American imperialism, seemed to be a stronger champion of Asian nationalism, or Asian continentalism, than parties such as the Indian Congress. It threw these parties on the defensive by equating them with the nationalist government of the Kuomintang in China which it had itself overthrown; and it accused them of governing, not in the interest of the masses, but of the well-to-do. The Communist dialectic, by this time becoming better known in Asia, suggested that Communism was the inevitable historical end for all Asia. It was the wave of the future. Finally the Chinese Communists conveyed the idea that they alone had the prescription for the radical measures needed to end the frustration in Asian society, release its great productive resources, and thus remove its curse of poverty. The chief of these measures was land reform: the next industrial planning.

How strong is the force of Communism is best realized by making the imaginative effort to see it through the eyes of one of the younger graduates of an Oriental university, say in India. He might soliloquize as follows:

'It happens that, because of the previous subjection of my country to the West, we have adopted a liberal and parliamentary form of government. But I am quite open-minded about it. If it leads to rapid economic advance, I am content. If not, why not try Communism? What binds me to the West? Since my country was liberated, it has been the fashion to fraternize with our former rulers and to indulge a sentimental regard for them, partly because they took us by surprise by fulfilling their promises to abdicate. But from the West came also the enslavement and humiliation of Asia. That is not forgotten. The West is the West; Asia is Asia; and our starting point is far more like that in China and Russia than in the West. What China and Russia have achieved may therefore mean more to us than the achievements of the West, even if these are more spectacular. Suppose that Communism means the sacrifice of personal liberty and the proscription of whole classes. Life is cheap in Asia as it is. Freedom is almost meaningless. We may have made a good bargain if we exchange freedom for the sense that there is a chain of command leading from the dictator at the top to the ploughman in the field, and that every purpose of government, to which all else may be sacrificed, is to build up the wealth and strength of the country. Is not the psychological climate of Communism as practised in China—the revivalism and soul searching—preferable to the coldness of life as lived by Western ideas? Finally, if revolution is to come, if deep forces in society are working irremediably for the victory of Communism,

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is it not mere prudence for me to move with the wave rather than against it? If I can understand correctly the currents of the time, they may carry me to high place.'

[ vi ]

Such is the picture of the new Asia.

In South Asia in the place of the old Empires are the succession states with political systems derived ultimately from Anglo-Saxon models. Because they are so new, because the societies are in a state of rapid change, they cannot be very stable.

To the north are China and Russia, Communist, and utilizing in their external relations all the forces which belong to them as the champions of international Communism.

Inevitably the two sets of system compete even though many of the people in South Asia close their eyes to this, and believe that the two systems can be friendly neighbours. Nationalism is the force which sustains the succession states. But the Communists try to steal nationalism for themselves. They deny the claim of the professional 'nationalist' parties to have liberated their countries from Western imperialism. Emancipation, they say, was a fraud: what happened was a bargain between the 'nationalists' and imperialists, the imperialists conceding the show of freedom in return for the nationalists becoming their satellites.

The rivalry of the nationalists and Communists has been partly hidden because of the anxiety of the South Asian nationalist governments not to be caught in the power struggle between America and Communism. This has led them to try to maintain polite relations with Peking.

The Western powers, though they have genuinely renounced imperialism, support the succession states for military reasons—not so much because they need them as allies but in the hope of denying their wealth and manpower to Communism. Many of their statesmen wish also, on disinterested grounds, to see the survival in Asia of the new ideals—liberty and the rule of law—which were the best legacy of the imperial age and what would disappear once more with a victory of Communism.

How each of the succession states of the British Empire has fared up to the present is described briefly in the following chapters. In each it can still only be guessed at whether the present form of states will last very long.

## CHAPTER TWO

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# INDIA

[i]

**T**hroughout the long history of British rule in Asia, India had been the centre of the picture. It remained so after the end of the British Raj.

If India had fallen then into confusion, it would have been of little avail if order had been preserved in the rest of South Asia. Out of the upheaval in India, forces would have been generated which would have shaken down the order elsewhere. The new system which India would have adopted—perhaps after a long period—in its effort to restore stability would have been quite different from that before the catastrophe, and South Asia would have been subjected to quite new influences. •

That catastrophe has not happened. The stability of India five years after the transfer of power is the outstanding fact of South Asia to-day. India's prestige stands high.

In the weeks immediately after the transfer of power—on 15th August 1947—few people can have expected that this would happen. The earliest consequences of the transfer were appalling massacres in the Punjab which in the speed with which they happened exceeded anything that the gloomiest prophets had forecast. Nobody knows how many people died. Three million Moslems fled from India to Pakistan; three million Hindus and Sikhs fled from Pakistan to India, among them a large proportion of the minor civil servants and business men on which the orderly processes of government and commerce depended. •

What was the cause of this calamity? Several answers have been put forward. One view is that the British Government, having de-

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cided on partition, forced the pace and did not make adequate military provision to prevent the outbreak: in particular they failed to discover the preparations for violence being made by the Sikhs. Those who wish to justify the government's actions say that it could not have moved less quickly: if at that moment it had not forced through its transfer of power and partition at great speed, it would have risked a popular insurrection throughout India, so excited was the public everywhere. The discussion is hardly profitable: no certain conclusion can be arrived at. It may be that such passions had been stirred up in the Punjab by months and years of agitation that an explosion could not have been avoided except by the use of a much larger military force than by this time remained in India. The wonder—and the salvation of the two new countries—was that it was limited to the Punjab and did not spread to other provinces.

That was the evil consequence of partition. It was over in two months. Nothing as bad happened again (though in April 1950 it was touch and go whether there might not be a similar convulsion in Bengal as a kind of delayed reaction of partition in Eastern India). In retrospect, perhaps the most striking fact was that the machine of government, jolted by the great political changes and at a standstill during the actual massacres, very quickly came into operation again.

### [ ii ]

What has been the system of government in India since the transfer?

Independence did not mean change in the political direction in which India was moving. For forty years, as described in the earlier sections of this book, the aim of each reform had been to bring India nearer to full parliamentary self-government. In 1947 the goal was reached.

The new constitution of India, considered by a constituent assembly and ratified in 1950, was based on the Government of India Act of 1935, which Britain had regarded as the penultimate act before India achieved dominion status. The Act was recast so that all the part played by Britain in governing India was eliminated, and certain new sections were added, copied from other constitutions especially the American.<sup>1</sup> But eventually the new constitution remained similar

<sup>1</sup> A long statement of the fundamental rights of the citizen was added, and also what was called 'Directive Principles of State Policy'; these were borrowed from the constitution of the Weimar republic in Germany and of some South American states.

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to that of Britain (except that it was federal) and of the British dominions: it was parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type: the idiom of the constitution and its convention were all British. At the centre and in the provinces were parliaments elected by universal suffrage; the cabinet was responsible to Parliament, but could dissolve Parliament; election of representatives was more or less on English lines; there was no proportional representation.

Since India declared itself a sovereign independent republic there was no governor-general appointed by the British Crown. But the President, who was elected by the central and provincial parliaments, had a position in Indian politics very similar to that of the governors-general in the Dominions (though he enjoyed certain latent powers denied to these).<sup>1</sup>

Parliamentary government is perhaps especially well suited to the Indian temperament. It has functioned in India better than even the greatest optimists had forecast. Consider the record.

After the explosion in the Punjab, law and order have been maintained. Except for the Communists, no large section of the people has defied the decisions of cabinet and parliament.

Ministers have not encroached on the rights of the parliament.

The provinces—or states as they are now called—have not enlarged their autonomy wider than the constitution permitted.

The law courts have not been under political pressure, and their judgments have been respected.

The professional army—which in other countries rather similarly placed has often been a threat to constitutional government—has kept well out of politics.

There may have been corruption and a lowering of some of the standards of administration. But of what newly established democracy has this not had to be said?

The relative smoothness with which the political machine has worked in India is the more remarkable because so many of the political conditions were different from those in the countries whose systems were being imitated. The party structure for example. In

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most radical change in the new constitution was the merger of the princely states with the rest of India. When Britain laid down its power it terminated its treaties with the princes. Technically the princes became entirely free, but the great majority were without the means to make good their independence. Fortunately they were persuaded to surrender by their own free will to the new central government. Only Hyderabad resisted. Kashmir, a border state, became the subject for struggle with Pakistan, and brought much cost, embarrassment and temptation to the Indian Government.

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Britain and America there are two parties of more or less equal strength, and in the continental democracies of Europe several parties: the whole system turns on these facts. But in India, because of the circumstances of its struggle for liberation, there has until recently been among Hindus only one major party, the Congress, which, as the chief executive of the struggle against the British, had gathered into itself the most varied classes and interest groups. It cut right across the ordinary cleavages in society, and the Moslem League was the only party able to speak to it on equal terms; after partition and the secession of the Moslems even this opposition was removed. Thus in the first years of Indian independence, the Congress was in an overwhelming majority in the legislatures, both in the centre and in the provinces. How can parliamentary democracy function without an opposition?

On the whole the difficulty proved less in practice than it had been supposed in theory because Congress used its power with such moderation. The struggle between parties which usually takes place in parliaments was in India transferred to struggles between different factions of Congress. And after the general election early in 1952, the disparity between Congress and other parties—especially the Communists—began to lessen.

There has been another peculiarity in Indian politics rising out of the history of Congress. During the struggle against the British, Congress had come to be regarded as the soul of the nation. The Congress Working Committee was the true custodian of the nation's interests. But what was to happen after independence when the Working Committee was faced, not by an alien British Raj but by Congress ministers who were responsible, constitutionally, not to the Working Committee but to the elected parliament? Which was the higher authority, the Party—venerated as it was because of its past history—or the elected ministers, and what would happen in case of conflict between the two?

Such a conflict did occur in 1951 when Congress elected as party president a leader who, because of his attachment to extreme Hindu orthodoxy, could not feel sympathy for Mr. Nehru's government. The collision ended in Mr. Nehru's victory: Mr. Nehru replaced his opponent, thus combining the offices of prime minister and party president. But this was Mr. Nehru's personal solution, and the issue between the Congress party organization and Congress ministers has really not yet been decided.

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[ iii ]

The success, up to the present, of the constitutional experiment has come about, not because of any special excellence in the constitution itself, but to a very great extent because of the wise policies of the Indian cabinet and in particular of the prime minister, Mr. Nehru. Some of their main features must be noticed.

*The government has tried to reconcile most sections of the population.* This has been the master key of Mr. Nehru's policy, and it has enabled him to overcome, or stave off, the dangers from India's inherent disunity. In a survey of the prospects in India made just before independence, the present writer said: 'If under British rule the divisions in society were whited over, the cracks are now showing more clearly again. The machine of the State rests on a crust of society which is splitting apart. . . . The paradox is that India is violently nationalist, that the aim of nationalism is to secure uniformity among its citizens, and that no country in the world is divided into so many sections. Nationalism cannot restrain itself from trying to hammer the country into unity; and it could with more safety hammer dynamite.' The wonder is that Mr. Nehru's government did refrain. Its policy was to unite the country, but to unite it by conciliation.<sup>1</sup>

The government has shown the greatest solicitude for the minorities. It has never driven them to the wall. It threw all its influence—and very effectively—against the fanatics of the Hindu Mahasabha who wished for a dictatorship of the orthodox. It protected the Moslem minority left behind in India after the creation of Pakistan. (Nothing in Mr. Nehru's government becomes it so well as the protection it gave to a community which could not expect to be very popular. It proved the sincerity of the government's claim to treat all sections on an equal footing, regardless of origin or religion.) It set itself against taking revenge upon the persons and classes which used formerly to support the British Raj and frustrate the Congress. It found it the easier to show leniency because before independence so many prominent families had kept a foot in both camps. One member might be a civil servant, another a Congress leader; the Nehrus them-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Acton used to distinguish between a continental kind of democracy and an Anglo-Saxon kind. In the first there was popular government, but the will of the majority prevailed, and the minority had virtually no rights. In the second the government, though representing a majority, exercised its power with caution, and never entrenched unreasonably on the liberties of the minority. Mr. Nehru's government belongs to the second class. This was remarkable in an atmosphere so much charged with nationalist passion.



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selves were an example. Congress is a comprehensive party including all classes, and by and large it has done something for all classes.

The policy of indulgence paid well. The classes which had feared punishment—civil servants, business men, some professional men—rallied, in gratitude and relief, to the support of the government.

The reconciliation of the civil service had especially useful consequences. A country so fissiparous as India, with such complex problems of government, requires a very efficient administrative machine to hold it together. The machine which India inherited from the British Raj was the most efficient in Asia. But at one time it had seemed likely that it might throw it away. During the struggle for freedom, Congress had denounced the civil service as authoritarian and soulless. In their first days in power, Congress politicians often overruled civil servants in day to day administration. The cabinet saw the danger of this and restored the prestige of the civil servant, whose loyalty it thereby won. At the same time it set itself to organize the new service for the future, able to undertake duties far beyond those of civil servants of the previous generation.<sup>1</sup>

*It has kept a mean between too little liberalism and too much.* India is always a potential volcano: that had been shown in the explosion in the Punjab in 1947 and the near explosion in Bengal in 1950. How could there be liberal and parliamentary government, which requires the maximum freedom for agitation, without putting the country at the mercy of fanatics who would release the pent-up furies? A reckless newspaper editor, by publishing false news and by inciting to violence, may with great ease cause a massacre. Mr. Nehru's government tolerated in general the most extensive freedom for discussion, while intervening with resolution at the moment when reckless communal leaders were threatening havoc.<sup>2</sup>

Under the Preventive Detection Act, the government has exceptional power to imprison for set terms without trial. Mr. Nehru has used this power with moderation. In June of 1952 the total number of people detained under the Act was 1,190, and of these 553 were in Hyderabad, where the Communists had been in open armed rebellion.

<sup>1</sup> After independence the superior grade of the service had been weakened numerically by the disappearance of most of the British members. At the same time a heavy new demand was made on it for administration of the one third of India which had been princely territory. With the development of the beginnings of the welfare state, it had to undertake much enlarged duties. And the administration of a large number of economic controls exposed it to new temptations.

<sup>2</sup> In judging the government in India it is always necessary to remember the volcano. Those in danger of forgetting might do well to read General Tuke's shudder-making book 'While Memory Serves'.

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What of the press? The government has shown the same mixture of tolerance and firmness. It secured the passing of a law giving it disciplinary powers in an emergency, but it has so far kept its powers unused.

*It has begun a large plan of economic construction.* Congress is not a party of social revolution. (It is drawn from all classes, and thus cannot try to establish a dictatorship of one over all the others.) Its aim is to increase the total national wealth. In its first five years it may not have achieved very much. But it is now executing an impressive five-year plan for irrigation, electrification, better roads, more industries. This is the government's counter-measure to the appeals and promises of the Communists. Mr. Nehru has pledged his government to see that the first profits from national development do not go entirely to the capitalists, merchants and moneylenders.<sup>1</sup>

In finance, the government checked the inflation. 'If you want to make a revolution', said Lenin, 'debauch the currency.' By not doing so, the Indian government greatly improved the prospects of the regime.

So also by the agrarian reform which the provincial governments, under Congress direction, one by one carried out. The grievances of peasants against landlords have been a great food of revolution. In India every province except Bengal has now passed a law by which estates of any size will be broken up and sold to the peasants. The legislation took five years because the landlords challenged its constitutional validity stage by stage. But the laws are now being put into effect.

### . [ iv ]

The high point of the parliamentary history of India since independence was the general election in the mid-winter of 1951-2. If ever a country took a leap in the dark towards democracy it was India. The number of electors was enlarged suddenly from 30 million to 176 million, of which about 85 per cent were illiterate. The parties had to adopt visual symbols—such as an umbrella or plough—to be placed on the ballot papers: the illiterate could then place their mark against the candidate of the party which they wished to support. The area to be covered was so huge that the election could not be held simultaneously in all states: it took place successively in different parts, and the administrative staff moved round from election to election.

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that the Secretary of the Planning Commission is an Englishman who remained in the service of the Indian Government.

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In spite of all these handicaps the election was fought intelligently. All the evidence shows that the great mass of the simple people were somehow made aware of the basic issues, even if in a sketchy way, and that they weighed them seriously. Malpractices, intimidation, bribery certainly took place, sometimes on a grave scale: but they were less than was feared. More than half the qualified electors went to the polls, and this was surely remarkable in a country so inexperienced in democratic ways.

Perhaps the feel of the general election is best given by one of the candidates who took part in it. Shortly after it was over, an article appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* by Mr. Shiva Rao, one of the Congress candidates in the south. He wrote:

‘My constituency in the recent Indian general election was a rural one on the picturesque, palm-fringed coast-line about four hundred miles south of Bombay. At the start of my campaign I looked at the formidable pile of electoral rolls in front of me. There were 342,000 voters, men and women—but more women than men, as my wife discovered.

‘How was I to get in touch with 342,000 voters? That was my first problem. We built up election committees at various centres whose members would arrange meetings, distribute our literature, and visit voters in their homes. A surprisingly large number of eager young women came forward, volunteering their services. I must have addressed more than four hundred meetings in the course of my election campaign: sometimes in a school or a cinema hall, but more frequently beneath a shady banyan or mango tree. The size of my audiences varied according to the surroundings from 100 to 5,000.

‘I was under the impression, when I began my election campaign, that the voters would be concerned about such issues as the Nehru Government’s foreign policy. That was of interest, of course, in the urban areas; but my constituency was predominantly rural. The average villager was naturally more interested in the availability and price of rice (his main article of food) and cloth. I promptly readjusted my election speeches to the needs and interests of my voters. They did not care whether a particular problem was for the Central or for the State Government to tackle. A school, a hospital, a bridge, a post office—these and other necessities, apart from food and cloth, meant something real to them.

‘The large majority of the voters knew only one or more of three Indian languages, and my vocabulary in these was not as extensive as my opponent’s. I had, however, a great advantage in being a candi-

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date from a well-organized party which discarded all considerations of religion or race.

'My opponent had the support of the Communists and of some other groups. The Communists have been working in the region for some years, concentrating their attention in the towns on the industrial workers. In a period of rising prices they had been able to secure various concessions (including wage increases) from the employers, and these achievements gave them a firm hold on the workers. In some of the rural areas they exploited the insecurity of agrarian tenure. I had, in early life, done a good deal to build up the trade union movement in South India, and felt that I had some claim to be heard by the workers. Also, the electorate, I thought, was not sufficiently clear about the danger of Communist influence spreading farther. "There is in this election", I said at my first meeting, "one main issue: Do you want India's economic and social progress through Gandhi's principle of non-violence, or have you no objection to bloodshed and terrorism?" I struck that note all through my campaign, and naturally drew the fire of the Communists on myself. After polling I reckoned that my opponent must have received over twenty thousand votes from his Communist friends and supporters.

'Generally speaking, all my pre-election calculations were completely upset by the actual poll. With difficult communications in most parts of the constituency, and polling booths in some villages situated there, four, or even five miles away from the homes of the voters, I expected a maximum of one hundred thousand to record their votes, and a larger proportion naturally in the urban than in the rural areas. In both respects I proved utterly wrong. Actually 206,000 came to the polls, and voting in the villages was much better than in the towns. Cheerfully the rural voters walked long distances; men and women formed queues outside the polling booths and waited patiently for two or three hours and more for their turn to vote. Moslem women, because of their custom of wearing the veil, had exclusive booths to themselves.

'It was in some ways an incredible sight on polling day. I had been told by my Moslem friends that it would be impossible to persuade more than 2 or 3 per cent of their women to record their votes. Actually, a majority of Moslem women went to the polling booths. They walked through the streets in groups of ten or twelve, with a white sheet held over their heads. Some of our girl volunteers wondered what had suddenly roused them, accustomed as they were to the strict observance of the veil in their homes all their lives, thus

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suddenly to emerge into the open. It was an opportunity, some of them said, for walking through the bazaars which they were not prepared to miss. Having witnessed this phenomenon all over India and not only in my constituency, I feel that after a few general elections of this kind the long-standing practice of the veil will gradually go out of fashion.'

The result of the election was, formally, a sweeping victory for Congress. Out of 3,055 constituencies it won 2,085. It had overwhelming majorities in the two great states of Uttar Pradesh (the former United Provinces) and Bombay. In the Central Parliament it won 362 seats out of the total of 489. It won an absolute majority in seven out of the nine states which had formerly been provinces of British India; and in five out of seven states which had been princely India.

The Congress victory was, however, modified by some surprising results in South India. In Madras and in Travancore-Cochin it met what was near disaster.

The results in these two states was notable for the rise of the Communists as the challengers of Congress. Travancore-Cochin was the first major area in which results were announced. Congress won only 44 out of the 108 seats; 37 were won by the Communists. In Madras, the great centre of the south, the Communists won 61 out of the total of 375 seats. Six out of the nine Congress ministers were defeated.

The results in Hyderabad were also uncomfortable for Congress. True, it won 42 out of 75 seats. But in the Telangana area, in which the Communists had been carrying on an armed rebellion, the victory of the Communists was sensational. They won in 23 out of 26 constituencies.

When these results became known an excited discussion broke out. Was the south typical of all India to-morrow? Was the Communist party, which had been derided because of the bitter quarrels of its leaders and frequent purges, the rising party which was to repeat in India its triumphs in China? Congressmen after their first shock found comforting explanations in local circumstances for what had happened.<sup>1</sup> To some extent the explanations were fair. But they did not alter the fact that Congress had been jolted.

<sup>1</sup> In Madras, Congress had become notoriously corrupt, and ministers were incompetent. There had been a succession of famines. Madras was divided between Tamil speakers and Telugu speakers, and the Telugus voted against Congress because Delhi had refused them a separate province. Hyderabad had been unsettled by the excitement and anarchy which preceded India's military

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When all the election returns had been digested, four principal facts stood out. Congress, in spite of its great majorities in the north, had received a warning. In the whole country twenty-eight of its ministers (including three provincial prime ministers) had been defeated. Though Congress won so many seats, it gained most of them on a minority vote and because of the divisions of its opponents. Nowhere did Congress get more than 60 per cent of the votes. In most states it got between one third and a half. Thus Congress, though clearly the victor, and though in overwhelming control of the government, had failed to prove that it was the people's instinctive choice to the extent which it had hoped to demonstrate.

The second fact was the poor showing of the Socialists and their allies; the third fact, the outclassing of the Socialists by the Communists. The Socialists ought to offer a non-Communist alternative to Congress if the electorate should in future repudiate Congress. Among their leaders are many forceful and imaginative men. But the election seemed to show that they would be by-passed, and that the succession to Congress, if Congress lost power, would go to the Communists. The Socialists won only 112 seats compared with 182 won outright by the Communists (to which must be added the considerable number won by concealed Communists who claimed to be independents).

It is true that the performance of the Socialists was not really as bad as these figures suggest. Their total poll in the country was ten million which was almost double the poll of the Communists, and the largest of any of the parties after the Congress. Why, then, did the Socialists do so badly in the number of seats won? Because their electoral tactics were bad. They spread their efforts widely. Thus they gained many votes but few seats. The Communists on the other hand concentrated on the areas in which they had most hope.<sup>1</sup> But a party which was badly led at the elections does not command confidence. In future, ambitious young men will think twice before attaching themselves to it. The Communists on the other hand had established

occupation of it. In Travancore-Cochin there was the highest rate of literacy in India combined with terrible poverty, and unemployment among the clerical classes. Moreover the Communists had for a long while concentrated a special effort on agitation in Travancore.

<sup>1</sup> The Communists did not succeed everywhere that they fought hard. They did surprisingly badly among the industrial electorate of Calcutta where they made a great effort. It was curious that they failed almost everywhere to win the industrial proletariat. They got their support from the peasantry and the lower middle class. This may affect their later policy. The Communist strength is very patchy. In three quarters of India they secured no support at all.

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their right to be taken seriously as a claimant for power. The hardest task of a new party in India is to convey the idea that it could conceivably succeed in taking over the government. By their success in the elections, the Communists got over that first obstacle<sup>1</sup>.

The fourth fact, and a happy one, was the complete and humiliating defeat of the Hindu communal parties which under various names had attacked Mr. Nehru because he did not reorganize India on archaic Hindu lines, and which breathed fire and slaughter against Pakistan and all Moslems. In all India they won only fifty-six seats; and even some of their candidates who succeeded were not really old-fashioned fanatics at all, but land-owners whose only interest was to preserve their estates.

[ v ]

If this picture of independent India is a fair one, the regime can be said to have been so far a success. Indian patriots may be soberly pleased. But to see where India now stands it is necessary to move further back and take a more comprehensive view.

The regime has succeeded because in the century and a half of British rule there had come into existence a very large middle class, broad based economically, which had adopted, with a whole-heartedness which is one of the wonders of modern history, the political ideas of the Anglo-Saxons. This middle class has been determined to manage the affairs of India in a Western way. Because its hold has not been loosened, because it occupied the key posts—political, administrative, military, economic, academic—it has achieved its aim.

But the future is very unsure.

With each year that goes by, a part of this great Indian middle class dies: and new men grow up, less set in the old ideas, more willing to turn to something new. The universities continue to produce an excess of students who will be unable to gain a salary which fits their education; they will be recruits for revolution, the more so because liberal education has removed their inhibitions against change and violence. (They will have much influence. In all economically backward countries the intelligentsia enjoys power because it

<sup>1</sup> The Socialists may have suffered because of erratic policies of their leaders. Some of them have at times had a surprising and very unfortunate understanding with the communal parties in attacking the Congress Government for what they alleged to be its weakness towards Pakistan. The Communists gained in popularity because of genuine welfare-work among the peasantry and in the towns undertaken as one of their side-lines.

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has fewer competitors from other sections of society.) The industrial proletariat forces its way gradually into the picture. The ceaseless Communist propaganda will certainly win some response from this class.

The peasants, still the overwhelming mass of the Indian people, are being slowly organized by the politicians. It was peasant armies raised by the Communists which overthrew Chiang Kai-Shek in China. May not the same happen in the end in India? The peasants are virtually untouched by the British Oriental civilization described earlier in this book. For them parliamentary democracy means nothing and offers little. All they are aware of is a worsening economic position and the promises by Communism of a great dynamic and quasi-military effort to raise living standards. Congress has made a land reform; but a recent inquiry made by the Government of India has shown that the proportion of peasants who are mere labourers and have no land at all, owned or rented, is a great deal higher than was realized. Most of these are potential supporters of Communism. The peasants dislike the high taxes levied to pay for the beginnings of the Welfare State, and particularly they dislike the welfare officers quartered on them by government for whose upkeep they have to pay. The much advertised Community Centres, one of the government's chief efforts, have really still to prove their worth. If the Communists start a no-tax campaign, copied from the former no-rent campaign of the Communists, the government would be seriously embarrassed.

All the time the population grows. It is already 350 million—perhaps a greater total even than that of China whose figure is unknown—and is growing at the rate of five million a year in what has been called a devastating torrent of babies. It is true that Malthusian gloom over expanding populations is out of fashion; technical changes have enabled society in the West to accommodate increasing manpower. But in the eastern agricultural empires, Malthus's pessimism has proved better founded. The great convulsion in China may, in the last analysis, have been the result of a population crisis. In India, population is being poured into an economic system whose sides can scarcely hold it indefinitely. India is like a man whose nose is by a hair's breadth above water: the merest ripple on the water means death. Over all the fertile parts of the country the people now compete for land, and the result, as happened in China, is that holdings become smaller and social tension increases. It is a disturbing fact that India's great political experiment is being carried on against a



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background of a steadily falling standard of living. The fall has been going on for forty years and the root cause is the population growth. Although it has been found in many countries that when the standard of living rises beyond a certain point, a decrease of the birth-rate automatically sets in, in India the rise in population may prevent the standard of living ever reaching that point, or an explosion due to the population increase may occur before it does so. Unquestionably the greatest benefactor of India would be he who could make two ears of wheat or rice grow where one grew before and one baby grow where two grew before. But in a vast illiterate and poverty-stricken society, birth control is extremely difficult. Nor can industrialization, even on the grandest scale, draw off more than a small fraction of the increasing surplus of farmers. Should atom power be harnessed and used for irrigation, large tracts of desert might be cultivated, and so the danger would be removed for a time. But, failing this, a growing tension is probable, and the surging flood of superfluous people may turn into a revolutionary army.

There are also psychological considerations.

The struggle for independence caused an exhilaration which could not last and which was bound to be followed by anti-climax. Anybody who was in India at the time of the midnight proclamation of liberation, or saw the pictures of the crowds rejoicing at Delhi, will remember the mood of the moment. There was of course disappointment that freedom had been purchased at the cost of the partition of the sub-continent: but this did not overshadow the joy. The classic descriptions of times of high hope and expansive feeling fit the temper of that moment. 'Now walk we on the top of happy hours.' 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.' With one section of the people the feeling was particularly strong. The convinced followers of Gandhi believed that Gandhism was really practicable, and that Mr. Gandhi had the secret for men to live in peace and in a new golden age. The opportunity was now given to India to demonstrate to the rest of the world how, by applying the Gandhian doctrine, all things could be made new.

The return to earth during the next years was very dreary. So many dreadful and discouraging events happened. Mr. Gandhi was murdered. The nation had lost its guide and comforter, and in particular the only censor who might have been able to prevail upon ministers to try really to follow the eccentric political paths which Gandhism recommended. The wave of idealism disappeared in the sands of day-to-day politics. Things went on outwardly much as in

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the past; the mass of the people had very seldom seen anything of the few hundred British civil servants, and their withdrawal was therefore little noticed; the great reforms projected by the government would take time to complete. Far from all being made new it seemed that the old world had survived, and that the agitation against it, which had been respectable and was an outlet for frustrated spirits, was now suddenly called off and frowned on. There had been a political revolution, but in the absence of an accompanying social revolution it had proved a cold and unsatisfying affair.

India has always wanted religion. For a time the nationalism of Congress satisfied the younger generation, so nearly religious was its appeal in its early stages. But nationalism, once triumphant, falls into trouble because of its barren contents. What does it offer? In the last resort, as Mr. M. N. Roy has pointed out, Indian nationalism means no more than race pride, and suspicion or hatred of other races, especially the West. This cannot satisfy those who crave for something positive and generous. This instinct may for a time be gratified even by anti-religion and extreme secularism, if they are pursued fanatically. But can a liberal system, once established and running as a going concern, provide any sustenance of this sort? The need for new creeds is the greater because the traditional ones have crumbled. Communism, unhappily, has already in many countries been found to have many of the qualities of a substitute religion.<sup>1</sup>

The attraction of Communism will of course be all the greater because of the sheer difficulty of carrying on any system of government in India. There is so much that needs to be changed. There are so many frustrations. Everything always appears in muddle and confusion and delay, as it must in a country where the people are unaccustomed to urban discipline, have little sense of time, are governed often by prejudices and considerations which belong to archaic civilization, and are naturally incompetent because of chronic ill-health and the appalling heat of much of the year. Is it to be wondered at if impatient young men in despair conclude that the only way to transform society is by a kind of military system in which there is a clear chain of command and sanction of force? That is the temptation to all young men who, having through education acquired a modern outlook, find themselves compelled to work in an ancient

<sup>1</sup> One of the clearest proofs of the hunger for religion, even among the left-wing, is the growing attempt by Indian Socialists to give socialism a religious basis. Some of their leaders have even abandoned politics for meditation. The party is trying to elevate Gandhi's disciple Vinoba Bhave into their prophet. He is offered as an alternative to Marx.

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society which puts up strong resistance to every attempt to change it. But once the educated young men despair of reform by constitutional means, they are more than half-way to Communism.

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At the present time the government is securely in the hands of an army of Congress officials, nesting under the huge figure of Jawaharlal Nehru. (This is ironical for in personality he is the enemy of party placemen.) Nehru is probably now unassailable by Communist propaganda. A peculiarity of India is that, when a person has by long process at last established himself as a favourite of the nation- public opinion never turns against him again. Reverses such as happen in the West do not happen in India. Mr. Nehru is probably secure for life. But when that towering figure falls, Congress, in the eyes of much of the country, may be left little more respectable than was the Kuomintang in China. The sea of 'white caps' may become regarded as something which has to be drained away for the sake of the nation's health. In that day, India may be in real danger of turning Communist unless new leaders rise to give the old Congress a new programme and new life.

When the period since independence is seen in perspective, it is likely that the main achievement of Congress will be seen as that of having pulled the country together after the turmoil of the struggle for freedom. For three decades Congress, using every instrument, had been girding at government. Ceaseless criticism and agitation had eroded most of the moral prestige of the administration. The minds of the young men had been trained so that they respected only opposition. For Congress to change from heading the hunt against government to conducting government was a remarkable transition. It did so with success. It gave the country a period of quiet to take stock of what had been achieved and to get ready for the next jump. A next jump will come. In what direction will it be?

## CHAPTER THREE



# PAKISTAN

[ i ]

Pakistan's achievements have been in some ways more spectacular than those of India. It began with so much less. It had to do so much more than India if it was to survive. The machinery of government had to be created; though it inherited the apparatus of district government from the British Raj, it was an apparatus untended, for in the western half of the state—the Punjab and Sind—most of the Hindu officers had fled, even down to the lowest ranks. In the central government a brand new machinery had to be created, for it was India which inherited the Delhi secretariat, not Pakistan.

In the first days of the country's existence, the administration consisted of a group of politicians, few of whom had had actual experience of government, and a not very large group of trained civil servants, most of whom were emigrants from India. Offices, files, the material machinery of administration, scarcely existed. On this embryo government, there burst in the first few weeks the problem of stopping the violence against Hindus inside Pakistan, and of providing for the very large number of Moslem refugees—about 2½ million—who were in flight from Hindu violence in India.<sup>1</sup>

Indian politicians, in agreeing to partition, had generally thought that the life of Pakistan would not be very long; and many unbiased outside observers had been inclined to agree. Six years after the creation of the state, it appears that they were wrong. They did not foresee, or give sufficient weight to, the enthusiasm felt for Pakistan

<sup>1</sup> The number of Moslem refugees in Pakistan was no greater than the number of Hindu refugees in India, but the proportion which they bore to the total population was of course very much higher.

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by most of its people, and their satisfaction at finding themselves possessed of their own state. This propelled the country through its first very difficult days. To-day, Pakistan's prestige in the world equals that of India.

[ ii ]

Pakistan was slower than India in drafting its new constitution; and in the first six years the government functioned according to a modified form of the pre-independence constitution contained in the Government of India Act of 1935 (from which, of course, all the limitations on self-government had been shorn away). No general election took place.<sup>1</sup> But, as in India, the political life was carried on in a parliamentary and liberal way, except upon one occasion when the Governor-General—acting under the sense of great urgency—dismissed his prime minister, thus departing from the normal convention that a Governor-General does not act arbitrarily.

This even and civil course of government was the more remarkable because Pakistan includes some of the most turbulent areas of the former Indian Empire. Who, fifty years ago, could have imagined parliamentary government among the Pathans or the Sindhis of the desert region? Or who, seeing the chaos in the Punjab immediately after independence, would have thought that a rule of law would be quickly re-established? There have been occasional explosions of the volcano underneath. Liaquat Ali Khan, the very able prime minister, was assassinated in October 1951 by a murderer whose motives were never discovered. But India also suffered the assassination of Mr. Gandhi.

One of the arguments against creating Pakistan had been that it would be non-viable economically. But world prices rose high for the raw materials which it produced, and rose very much higher after the outbreak of the Korean war. Pakistan did not devalue the rupee when the pound was devalued and with it the Indian rupee; thus it was able to buy equipment from abroad at cheap prices. All went so well that many Pakistanis assumed that the country had a charter of permanent prosperity. This undoubtedly fostered the spirit of elation and resolution which visitors to Pakistan at the time all remarked upon. A change came in 1952. The prices of raw material fell, and jute, the chief export crop, was for a time almost unsaleable. To-day Pakistan, like India, faces grave economic problems. But it has one continuing asset. It consists chiefly of parts of the Indian sub-con-

<sup>1</sup> There have been elections for the provincial legislatures.

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tinient in which population has not outgrown subsistence. (East, Bengal is an exception.) Thus Pakistan is not driven by the same pressure of over-population as India.<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan's chief weakness, for which it is only partly responsible, is that it has become locked in a dismal combat with India. Though weapons have not been used since 1948, the threat of war remains. The quarrel has been primarily about Kashmir, but there is also a range of lesser disputes, such as over the safeguarding of canal waters in the rivers of Pakistan whose head-waters are in India, and over settling the property claims of the five or six million refugees from both countries. The most reasonable settlement of Kashmir might well be to partition the country between India and Pakistan. But it is not easy to talk reason to nationalist movements on the rampage. The Pakistan Government, knowing that the country would be destroyed if there were war with India, has on the whole been more moderate than the public opinion in the country, and has more than once agreed to compromise measures which struck most impartial observers as sensible. Unhappily these proposals were always rejected by India.

Bad relationship with India on one side of the frontier has been balanced with equally bad relations on the other, with Afghanistan. This quarrel came as a surprise for it had been expected that the two Moslem states would fraternize. But Afghanistan saw in the end of British rule a chance for expansion. It is a ramshackle and polyglot state. But its ruling family is Pathan, and was ambitious to extend its authority over the Pathan peoples in Pakistan. A movement sprang up for the creation of Pakhtoonistan, an autonomous state for the Pathans—its sponsors thought of autonomy as a half-way stage to incorporation in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government probably instigated the movement, and certainly supported it. On the whole Pakistan showed much restraint in its dealings with Afghanistan. Its hand was strengthened because its own policies towards the Pathans inside Pakistan had been enlightened, and their loyalty had been won.<sup>2</sup>

Another cause of anxiety for the rulers of Pakistan was their relations with their own armed services. In all the Moslem countries of the Middle East, the army has intruded into politics. At one stage it

<sup>1</sup> The food deficit in 1952 and 1953 was due to an unusual concatenation of causes and is not likely to recur often.

<sup>2</sup> There was suspicion that the murder of Liaquat Ali Khan was instigated from Afghanistan.

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seemed likely that this would happen in Pakistan also, since a competent army faced a government which at times seemed weak in the defence of the national interests. A trial of strength took place in the spring of 1951. A group of high-placed army officers—including the chief of staff—were arrested, together with a newspaper editor and some radical politicians, and were charged with plotting a military dictatorship. Their trial, held in complete secrecy in a remote desert city where it was hoped that it would attract least attention, lasted nearly two years. It ended in convictions, no death penalties, but fairly long prison sentences. Some of the officers were related to the principal political families of the country. The facts about the plot are still inadequately known, but can be plausibly guessed at. The army officers were angry with the government because of its handling of the Kashmir quarrel; the radical politicians tried to use this discontent to promote revolution. Was this result of the contest between army and civilian government the final and decisive one? On the whole the army took the sentencing of its officers very calmly. A main thought of many of the officers may have been that the misfortune of their colleagues had opened unexpected prospects of promotion for themselves. But some must have reflected that if the arrested Pakistani general had been a little more successful, his career might have anticipated that of General Neguib. They may think it worth while to try again.

### [ iii ]

These were the main political events in the first six years of Pakistan. Towards the end of that time there occurred a political drama which was of great interest in itself, which had important constitutional consequences, and may have lasting results in the history of the state. This event—in April 1953—was the dismissal, by the high-handed act of the Governor-General, of the administration of Nazim ud Din, and his replacement as prime minister by Mohammed Ali.

For some months before this crisis, there had been a worsening of many of the affairs of the country. Economic difficulties had grown serious. The enthusiasm of the people which had hitherto sustained the state began to falter. Corruption was known to be increasing, and the machinery of government became visibly less efficient than before, both in the villages and at headquarters. (This contrasted deplorably with India, where the efficiency of rural administration, if not of the larger units, has been maintained in a remarkable way.) The govern-

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ment began to use the police too freely and arbitrarily. The worst feature of all was an increase in the strength of the mullahs—the teachers of the law of Islam.

When Pakistan was first set up, gloomy prophets had said that within a decade it would be in the hands of reactionary mullahs. At first it had seemed that the prophets were wrong. While Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan ruled the country, the mullahs were kept in their place. They were both masterful men and modern in their outlook; though Liaquat Ali Khan was a pious Moslem he did not allow the mullahs to dictate to him politically. But after his death a change came over the country. People who visited Pakistan noticed the trend, which was particularly strong in the small towns but was visible even in cosmopolitan Karachi. The old narrow orthodoxy was again able to use sanctions. Women were being pushed back into purdah. On one occasion the mullahs could work up dangerous riots against the Foreign Minister, Sir Zafrullah Khan—who is a tower of strength to the country—simply because he belonged to a dissident sect. The trouble was that the educated middle class in Pakistan was much smaller than in India, and its modern outlook could therefore not dominate the country in the same way as in India.

This change in the cultural climate was reflected in the proposals for the new constitution, which the government at last brought forward early in 1953. In most of its parts the constitution was enlightened and liberal: it confirmed that the government was to be on the Westminster pattern of parliamentary democracy. But it contained one extraordinary set of provisions. Since Pakistan was to be an Islamic state, the constitution gave to the mullahs—or at least to the orthodox—certain powers to vet or suspend the laws passed by the legislature. It set up, both at the centre and in the provinces, boards of 'persons well versed in Islamic law' with power to return to the legislature any new law which they consider repugnant to the Koran and the Sunna. The law could, it is true, be passed again by a legislature, but only if a majority was obtained of all the Moslem members. The preamble of the constitution also laid it down that in all branches of governmental activity, steps were to be taken to enable Moslems to order their lives 'faithfully and collectively' in accordance with the Koran. Some interpretations which could be given to this provision are alarming.

This constitution revived all the questions which had been asked about the nature of the state in Pakistan. It was avowedly a Moslem state; its government never claimed, like Mr. Nehru in India, to be



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secular in outlook. There was much talk of 'Islamic Socialism' though it was never exactly defined. It became a fashion to say that that Pakistan was a 'theocratic' state. Could such a state be truly liberal?<sup>1</sup>

These were the gathering clouds in the spring of 1953. The liberals in the state—the men who had really made the state—were quick to see the dangers; and it happened that Pakistan had as Governor-General one of the principal men of this class, the very able former civil servant Ghulam Mohammed. To him fell the task of stopping the drift by a *coup d'état* which, though formally legal, was hardly in line with the conventions of parliamentary government in the rest of the Commonwealth. As Governor-General he suddenly dismissed the cabinet, which was weak and divided, and replaced it by a ministry of all the talents in which the liberals predominated.

The liberally-minded and modern men were thus again in power. They took strong action against the mullahs. Two of these were sentenced to death for encouraging riots; though the sentences were commuted, they were sent to prison for long terms, and this although they were indisputably very learned and much revered. The new cabinet gave unmistakable leadership. They dealt capably with economics, and confidence began to return. They began to negotiate with India: it was easier for them—former civil servants and ex-colleagues of the civil servants in India—than it had been for the popular leaders of the Moslem league. (But the negotiations presently run into difficulties). They modified the theocratic provisions in the constitution, though, so strong is still the power of the mullahs, that they had still to include provisions for harmonizing laws with the Koran which may cause much trouble in the future.

Soon there must be a general election. Some of the signs are that the Moslem League may suffer. If it should lose its dominance, the politics of Pakistan would enter a new phase with a result which it is hard to foresee.

<sup>1</sup> Not unnaturally, the Indians were the most active in saying that Pakistan was veering away from liberalism. In making their complaints against 'theocracy', Indians usually meant that the non-Moslem citizens of Pakistan were discriminated against by the government and were second-class citizens. To some extent the complaint was just, for in East Pakistan the machinery of government was undoubtedly being used to oust the Hindus from their superior economic position. In this part of the country the Hindus, though a minority, had enjoyed for many years under the British almost a monopoly of government service, business and the professions. As soon as the Moslems gained political power, they used it to redress the economic balance.

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[ iv ]

A trouble which may lie ahead in Pakistan is the tension between its eastern and western halves. East Pakistan—Bengal—has the larger population. But few West Pakistanis can reconcile themselves to feeling that East Pakistan is the core of the state. The impetus to the creation of Pakistan came from the western half. The west speaks Urdu which is felt to be peculiarly the language of the Moslem state. East Pakistan speaks Bengali. The west has now a minute Hindu minority; there is a large one in east Pakistan.

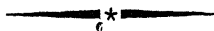
At first the trouble was less than had been feared. There was skill and forbearance. The present prime minister of the country is a Bengali. But the result of the general election in East Pakistan in March 1954—a complete defeat of the Moslem League by the opposition parties—showed that the dissatisfaction in East Pakistan was very widespread. It was intensified because the very large Hindu majority in East Pakistan is far from being reconciled to divorce from India. The existence of this discontented minority will be a continuing weakness of Pakistan. It is a minority which it will be almost impossible to appease.

[ v ]

What are the chances of Communism in Pakistan?

Because its economic problems are less immediately pressing than those of India, Pakistan is at present in less danger. But a Communist party exists and, as in India, attracts some of the most capable young men of the intelligentsia. Their propaganda has sapped and mined more effectively than is realized. They will be able to play increasingly on bitter grievances: for example, the lack of any drastic agrarian reform. If the Moslem League declines, they may have their opportunity. Sometimes it is said that Islam is a certain preservative against Communism. But is this true? Islam stands for the equality of man, condemns usury, demands social justice. Except for its affirmation of God's existence, it has a creed which in theory is not very different from that of the Communists. If Communism could modify its atheism, Moslems might lose much of their distaste for it.

## CHAPTER FOUR



# BURMA AND CEYLON

[i]

What has been the history of the smaller areas which were emancipated, Ceylon and Burma? In both the aim was the same as in India and Pakistan—to establish a parliamentary democracy in the hope that it might be the best means of satisfying national feeling and promoting social progress. The history of each has been strangely different. In Ceylon there has been relative success: in Burma disappointment.

The reasons for success in Ceylon are easy to discover. Because of its long contacts with the Portuguese, Dutch and British, Ceylon is perhaps the most westernized and sophisticated of the eastern countries. Like India it has a middle class which is competent and knows its own mind. Before independence they had had a fairly long experience in experimenting with elective forms of government, even though they were not fully self-governing; and in the first years of freedom they had the good fortune to find in Mr. Senanayake a leader of exceptional personality who was able to maintain unity where other prime ministers might, without personal discredit, have failed. Ceylon is a small country, and small countries are easier to manage than large ones (though Palestine and other examples show that even a small country can defy control). Its economic problems, though serious, are not unmanageable. It had the great advantage that during the war it was not overrun by the Japanese, and thus the continuity of its life was not disturbed.

These advantages are reflected in its record. In spite of the factionalism of Ceylonese parties, it has been possible to sustain a cabinet whose authority was not seriously challenged. Nobody revolted or

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took to the jungle. The government was able to start important schemes of economic development. It dealt with some success with the economic problems which rose from changing circumstances and from the wearing out of some of its natural assets, such as its rubber plantations in which replanting had been neglected. The government crowned its work by submitting to a general election, by conducting it more or less fairly, and by winning a new mandate.

At first sight it might be supposed that there need be little anxiety about the country's future. But the picture can be painted too bright. There are also disturbing signs. Extremism is growing, especially among the young intelligentsia. Ceylon is the only country in the world where there is a thriving Trotskyist party. There are communal divisions, and especially there is an unresolved quarrel between the government and the Indian population which has immigrated for labour on the estates and which today numbers about 800,000. A recent agreement with India about their political status is not likely to be a final one. Many Ceylonese fear that if all Indians are given full rights, they will presently dominate the island. Is it likely that over the long period Ceylon can maintain an existence separate from India's? If there are convulsions on the mainland of Asia, can Ceylon, however favoured, escape free? All these considerations suggest that Ceylon's future history may be more eventful than its past five years.

### [ ii ]

The reason why Burma since independence has been so much more troubled than Ceylon lies partly in the differences of its previous history. Burma had been under British rule for a shorter time than India, Pakistan or Ceylon; and the rule which it received had been less satisfactory. The old social order had disintegrated, and the new society which grew up was less well organized than in India.

Unlike India, Burma when it became independent had still a minute middle class. There had not been the complex economic development which brought the Indian middle class into being. Trade had certainly flourished in Burma under British rule, but it fell into Indian hands and did not supply a basis for a Burmese national renaissance. Thus there was no 'political class' of Burmans with a strong economic backing to their political ambitions. A university had existed in Burma for a much shorter time than in India. Burmese

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minds were less critical, sophisticated and practical than Indian.

Though a parliamentary assembly had been created in 1923 the parliamentary institutions had not taken root as in India. Such stability as had existed was ended by the Japanese invasion and the war fought on Burmese soil. Among the mass of the people, the memories of former lawlessness and banditry were still vivid. With the war-time breakdown of government, they took without difficulty to the old ways.

When the British power was transferred at the beginning of 1948, the recipients were a quite different type from the politicians in India. In India the Congress leaders had been engaged in subtle political manoeuvre for many years. They were old men, all with long experience. They were reinforced by distinguished men of affairs—professional administrators, civil servants from the princely states—who offered their services to the new regime. They too were old. Burma was in complete contrast. The new rulers were nearly all young men lately graduated from the University of Rangoon. These had the energy and appeal, and all the elderly were swept aside. They had grown up in an atmosphere of University Union politics and debating societies, and the books which by the chance of the time in which they had their education had formed their ideas and gained their loyalty were almost exclusively Marxist or at least left-wing socialist.<sup>1</sup> Thus their outlook was quite different from that of the Indians, which was still governed basically by the ideas of, say, John Stuart Mill. The Burmese took it for granted that the only desirable social order was socialism. They were extremely suspicious of Western countries because they were capitalist. They were prepared to be friendly to Russia because it was Marxist.

The history of Burma since independence has been very troubled and unhappy. One of the chief reasons was the difficulty of keeping the leaders together. Burmese are great individualists. (In Burmese football teams it has sometimes been necessary to have several captains because the leading personalities are unwilling to take second rank.) The new governing class quickly divided up into conflicting groups, and were encouraged to do so because of the riot of ideas which in any case would have provoked party differences. The immediate heir of the British power was a loose union called the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League. Within a short while this united

<sup>1</sup> Their reading was often very various. U Nu, the present prime minister, first came to fame as a translator. The books he selected were Marx's *Capital* and Dale Carnegie's *How to win friends and influence people*.

## BURMA AND CEYLON

front had split, and the government was being attacked—with arms, and by open rebellion—by Communists. The Communists themselves split into two rival parties, which sometimes fought, called the yellow bands and the white bands.

The disorder was made worse by an even more serious revolt of the Karen population. The Karens are a minority people, active and cohesive, racially distinct from the Burmans, many of them Christian. They had been happy under British rule because they had received protection from the Burmans, about whose rule they had a vivid and alarming memory. But some critics blame the British policy of encouraging the separate life of the minorities, and say that it was this which laid up trouble for the time when independence came. How to hold together a state with a diverse population had always been regarded as one of the hardest problems which would face the countries of South Asia when they gained self-government. (It was for that reason that India was partitioned before independence.) Burma is, up to the present, the only country where the insurrections which were feared have actually broken out; and in Burma the results were as serious as had been forecast. Faults on both sides brought on the Karen rebellion. The Karens demanded their own independent state, and, though the Burmese Government was willing to give some autonomy, the offer was at first limited to a small area, and the autonomy was too limited.

At first the Karens won striking military successes. Government came to a standstill over much of the country. Communications were blocked. The government was saved because the Karens—who are religious—refused to co-operate, except very sporadically, with the Communists. The seriousness of the rebellion taught the Burmese the need for moderation. More generous offers were made to the Karens, some of whom responded. The civil war, after lasting four years, dwindled. The Communists too failed to make headway.

With its strength slightly growing, the government regained confidence. It had been surprisingly tenacious of its better ideals. Even though it had spent most of its life literally behind barbed wire in Rangoon battling with military insurrections, it had preserved most of the forms of the parliamentary constitution. Ministers showed a remarkable desire to conserve the rule of law, independent courts, and—most surprisingly of all—a free and very critical press. The first act of the government as its fortunes improved was to hold parliamentary elections in three instalments over a large part of the

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country; and though the opposition said they were faked they do not seem to have been scandalous.<sup>1</sup>

Trouble is not yet over. If Communist China sent aid to the Burmese Communists, their revolt would become much more threatening. Yet at the moment the government looks like surviving.

It has hard tasks. It is threatened by international Communism—but it is still reluctant to believe that Communism can be really aggressive. It is offered economic help by the West—but it is still reluctant to believe that capitalist countries can be anything but wolves in sheep's clothing. The economy of the country is becoming simpler. With the disappearance of the exploitative Indian landlords, the peasants no longer have the same incentive for maximum production. Rice output has fallen; and a socialist government, pledged to establish a welfare state, finds its resources steadily declining. The Burmese leaders are doctrinaire socialists. But what form of socialism will be most suited to a relatively primitive peasant economy?

The wonder is that the breakdown in Burma has not been more disastrous; and for this the explanation lies partly in the quality of the people. They are humanists. They are still deeply religious. Alone among the great religions of the world, Hinayana Buddhism—the form of Buddhism practised in Burma and Ceylon—seems unshaken by the spirit of secularism and rationalism. Nor is this really surprising. Its theology is quite consistent with modern science. Its gentle despondency, its ethics, are excellently suited to twentieth-century man. Hinayana Buddhism induces compassion and detachment. Thus Burmese socialists—even many Burmese Communists—link their political doctrines with humanity and common sense. There is of course by tradition a harsh and extremely violent side to Burmese life: but there is also the gentle strand, and this may give peculiarity to whatever system of political ideas formally prevails in the country.

<sup>1</sup> Its record is the more remarkable because of the contrast with earlier history. In the past when Burma has gone through a period of disorder and strong government has been re-established, the government has been tyrannical. For example the eighteenth-century Burmese king, Alaungpya, almost exterminated the Maung people who, like the Karens to-day, had rebelled against Burmese rule. It might have been expected that the Burmese government to-day, with growing success, would have established the police state and taken its revenge. But it has not.

## CHAPTER FIVE



# MALAYA

[ i ]

**I**n one small part of its former vast territories in Asia, Britain did not lay down its authority in the years following the end of the war. This was Malaya. Hardly anybody in 1945 suggested that Britain should or could withdraw from Malaya as it was doing from the rest of its Asian Empire. The reason was that in the circumstances of the time there had not yet evolved in Malaya the party or group of parties to which power could be transferred.

Malaya showed plainly what was the condition for the successful abdication which Britain had carried out elsewhere. It was that in the last days of British power there should have grown up a disciplined, well organized political party able to attract to itself the allegiance given formerly to the British Government. Where this condition did not exist, Britain was a prisoner of its own Empire. It could not quit.

Before the war no such parties existed in Malaya. The political structure of the country was very peculiar. It was a plural society of extreme type. On the one hand was the Malay community, numbering about 2½ million. This was organized into nine sultanates (including one federation of sultanates) of a medieval, almost archaic pattern. But the sultanates were under the control of British advisers who injected some efficiency into the government and forbade its traditional barbarities. Thus the beginnings of a modern bureaucratic system grew up within the ancient forms. On the other hand were the Chinese, in number almost equal to the Malays, though as a very large number were concentrated in the great port of Singapore they were in a minority compared with the Malays in the rest of the country. They were tolerated as residents in the sultanates, and were



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the backbone of the economic life; but the great majority were not citizens, and were without political rights or power, or places in the civil service. The Malays nevertheless regarded them with fear because of the danger that they would eventually become supreme. But until the end of the war they had organized no effective political party able to demand their share of government or places in the superior civil service. They were the weaker because they were divided into groups which did not easily co-operate—those who had been born in China and still felt that it was their fatherland, those born in Malaya some of whom (but not all) felt the pull of China less, those who were English educated, those who were Chinese educated, those who were illiterate and poor. There was really no effective Chinese middle class. Though there were plenty of well-to-do Chinese, they were individuals: they did not form a class able to lead their race.<sup>1</sup>

Finally there were the Indians, 600,000 of whom still remained at the end of the war. Most were simple labourers, though there were also professional men and money-lenders. They lived their own life independent of the other two communities. In spite of some efforts by the Indian Congress to organize them, they produced no party able to stand up for their interests.

During the war these three communities had undergone Japanese rule. When the Japanese armies had arrived in Malaya and the British power was overthrown, all three peoples in Malaya appeared at first more or less indifferent. This coolness to the British cause struck left-wing people in Britain as very significant. Did it not mean that British rule, even though it maintained peace, was thoroughly unpopular? At least, very few of its subjects in Malaya had thought it worth taking risks to defend it. For a time it was the fashion to believe almost anything which put the British record in Malaya in a bad light. But what was to be done when the British armies returned to Malaya in 1945? If the old system was discredited, what form could a new and better system take, given the fact that there was no such party as the Indian Congress, the Moslem League, or the Burmese Thakins to which the British power could be made over?

### [ ii ]

The British Government did not resign itself to the restoration of the former authoritarian system of government. Its first endeavour

<sup>1</sup> Attempts by the Kuomintang in China proper to organize the Chinese in Malaya had been repressed by the British as the protecting power. These efforts were looked on as Kuomintang imperialism.

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was to modernize the archaic system of the sultanates and to build Malaya into a modern state. A distinguished colonial administrator, Sir Harold MacMichael, was sent to the country. By one means or another he persuaded the sultans to agree to a plan by which they would have surrendered most of their powers to a new and up-to-date union government. MacMichael may have set the pace too fast. The sultans, after consenting, withdrew their agreement and said that they had been coerced. They said the plan would have turned over Malaya to straightforward British rule, and might, if the British favoured the Chinese, deliver the Malays into their hands. The home government changed its plans, and the MacMichael scheme was dropped for a more gradual one.

The basis of this, which is now partly in force, was the setting up of a genuine federal executive and legislature, while leaving the sultans extensive powers in their own territories. (In the post-war period the governments of the sultanates have in fact become freer than before from the British advisers stationed in them.) The members of the legislature were at first to be appointed by the governments, but eventually were to be elected; in the first stage, before the elective system is introduced, the majority of the members are unofficial. Some of the members of the executive council are also non-officials. At the apex is the British High Commissioner, appointed by the British Government.

From this political structure the great cosmopolitan port of Singapore was excluded. Singapore was given its own separate government, which was rather further advanced towards democracy than the government in the Federation: the majority of the members of the Council of the Governor of Singapore were elected. The separation of Singapore and the rest of the Malay peninsula caused criticism, and it was argued that the British were at their old tricks of divide and rule. But the problems of Singapore—a great Babylon of commerce—and of the Federation are so distinct that separation, at least temporary, was forcibly suggested to the constitution makers. It was also a device to allay the fears of the Malays. Singapore is predominantly Chinese. If it had been included in the Federation, its sophisticated and wealthy population might have dominated the system. That would have meant the paramountcy of the Chinese of which the Malays are so much afraid.

To redress the grievances of the Chinese outside Singapore, a complicated new citizenship law was passed, after nearly six years of negotiation, which gives about 60 per cent of the Chinese in the

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country the right to take part in democratic processes, when these processes start to occur.

This was the legal framework of the new state. The institutions began to function (in part) in 1951. But by that time it had already become clear that the task of the British in Malaya was not one simply of political architecture and constitution making. Malaya, which had been one of the most languid and good-humoured parts of Asia, became with great suddenness one of the storm centres. Not only did the communal feud between Chinese and Malays become sharper (though after a time this was mitigated by a curious and probably temporary marriage of convenience between two of the communal parties). In the summer of 1948 began the Communist rebellion which was to dominate Malayan affairs, and, together with the war between the French and Viet Minh in Indo-China, to overshadow South-east Asia.

### [ iii ]

The Communist rebellion has already lasted four years. Its history is still only partly known. Some reports, which are perhaps only gossip and have certainly never been proved, are that it was decided on in consultation between all the Asian Communist parties at a conference in Calcutta in the spring of 1948 which was disguised as a gathering of sports clubs. (This took place under the nose of the Bengal police who noticed nothing.) Presumably the Russians approved; perhaps they initiated. How far they or the Chinese Communists at Peking have directed the action since, nobody seems to know. Probably the Malay Communist party enjoys a large autonomy like most other Communist parties in Asia. At one time it seems to have been subordinate to the Communist party in India, but that link has long been broken.

The ground in Malaya was well prepared for the insurrection. A small group of doctrinaire Communists, nearly all of them Chinese, had been forced into luxuriant vigour in the hot-house conditions of the war years. During the war the British encouraged them from afar—from Colombo the headquarters of the South-east Asia Command—as allies against the Japanese; daring British officers were sent to be in touch with them, and they were supplied with arms. For a short period at the end of the war, liberal-minded Englishmen hoped to co-operate with them. One of the most audacious Communist leaders was brought to London to march in the victory procession before

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King George VI. But the co-operation was always uneasy: the Communists were dogmatics who had their plans. By obtaining during 1946 and 1947 an effective control of labour in Singapore in giant labour unions, the Communist leaders set up in Singapore what was virtually a subsidiary government. When the real government challenged it, the leaders fled to the jungle and raised the revolt.

In the jungle the conditions were even better for them than in the towns. Very large numbers of the Chinese immigrants in Malaya were living in settlements which they had cleared for themselves, and without any governmental administration. These were the 'squatters'. Their number had increased during the disorder of the war years. The Communists were able to batten off them, and, because the government could not guarantee them protection, to terrify them into supplying food, arms, intelligence and recruits. They assassinated planters and government officers, blew up trains, ambushed roads, destroyed rubber trees, and forced the British Government to use for fighting them a large force which could have been more usefully employed in the protection of Western Europe. In the autumn of 1951 they murdered Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner, who was the author of most of the good ideas of British post-war action in Malaya.

The Communists made an appeal on many fronts. As champions of liberation they attracted the nationalists generally, Malay as well as Chinese. It is a mistake of the British to believe that the Malays are less in favour of freedom than the Chinese, or that they all abhor Communism. As a movement led in fact chiefly by the Chinese, Communism could appeal to the demand of the Chinese for more equal treatment. As a movement of the poor against the rich, it could use the appeal of class war. The rebellion was as much a social revolt against the wealthy as a national one against the imperialists. More Chinese rich men were assassinated and kidnapped than government officials or European planters.

The tactics of the Communists were undoubtedly skilful and imaginative. They had also remarkable endurance. But some people who have watched them at their work say that they could have been more competent, and that if their organization had been comparable to that of, say, the Stern gang in Israel, British power would have been totally overthrown.

Since the rebellion started the Malayan Government has announced again and again that it would very soon be put down. Several times it has claimed to have found at last the infallible counter-measure.

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Now it was to concentrate the 400,000 squatters in new villages, thus cutting away the economic support from the terrorists. Now it was to supervise vigorously all transport of foodstuffs so as to ensure that none reached the bandits. Now it was to make an example of villages which collaborated in any way with the Communists, and inflict heavy collective punishments on them. Now it was to spray weed-killer from the air on crops grown by the bandits in their remote jungle clearing, and thus starve them out. Now it was to organize a better intelligence system. Now it was to organize in the villages a Chinese Home Guard. Now it was better propaganda. Now it was to transform the spirit of the English civil servants and galvanize the administration. But still the rebellion has gone on, and when, as at the present moment, there are the signs of pacification, it has to be asked sceptically if they are likely to be permanent.

At no time do the Communists seem to have had more than 7,000 men actively in the field (as distinct from the many thousands engaged clandestinely in auxiliary operations). Nearly 4,000 have been killed, about 1,000 captured, and 1,000 surrendered voluntarily. But when each insurgent has been eliminated a reserve has been called up to take his place. Not one of the senior leaders has yet been caught, and not a single member of the Malayan party Politburo.

The Communists were of course much helped at the start by the ineptitude of the police and the British army in Malaya. At the beginning the police were weakened by a feud between officers who had from the start made their career in Malaya and officers brought in from the disbanded Palestine police. A report of a Commission of Inquiry on riots in Singapore in 1950 showed an extraordinary state of police incompetence in the city; the police in the Federation may not have been much better. The army also made mistakes. It remained too much tied to barracks, and did not use radio sufficiently for the rapid tracking of the bandits. These defects were later remedied. General Templer fostered new and much more successful techniques. But however good the military policing may be, it can scarcely prevent new rebellion erupting here and there whenever a serious attempt is made to promote it. A few shiploads of arms from outside and the arrival of a few new agitators from outside may stir up much new trouble.

There is another disturbing prospect. The rebellion began in fact at a time of general prosperity due to high prices for rubber, on which the economy of the whole country depends. Rubber prices are notoriously unstable; and the existence of synthetic rubber means

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that they can never in future rise above a certain level, and may at some time be forced down drastically if new and cheaper processes for making the synthetic product should be invented. What an immense reinforcement there would be to Communist propaganda if there should be a serious economic collapse.

That is the alarming lesson of the Malay war. In jungle country, and in a country where many people are poor and have economic grievances against the rich, a skilful Communist party may perhaps keep up a lasting war, or sub-war, against whatever government opposes it. How can this be remedied? Only by building a new society so closely knit that the bulk of the people trust one another, co-operate with the government by giving it information, and themselves carry on much of the policing.

### [ iv ]

It is to the credit of the British Government that in principle it has understood the problem. It has not put its faith simply in a military solution. While fighting the Communists in the jungle, it has at the same time pressed on with the building of the new state.

Malaya in this respect is experiencing a different history from India, Pakistan and Ceylon. In those countries the building of the new states had been partly finished before the storm of Communism burst upon them. Malaya resembles Burma more closely. The building of the new state and the fight against Communism have to go on simultaneously.

The British Government has acknowledged again and again that the only long-term defence against Communism lies in bringing into being a political and social structure in Malaya in which the three communities—Chinese, Malayan and Indian—are content. The basic concept has been simple: it is to transform Malaya from a plural society into one in which the Malay, the Chinese and the Indian think of themselves as Malayan, and accept the concept of a new Malayan nation. But how hard it is when each community is suspicious of the other and full of resentments, and when so many of the educated younger men turn as if by instinct to seductive appeals from outside.

Much of the effort has been praiseworthy. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald (the son of the former socialist prime minister Ramsay MacDonald), who held the diplomatic post of British Commissioner General in South-east Asia, took the first initiative in bringing together the Chinese and Malay leaders in informal consultations in a

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Communities Liaison Committee. Besides preparing the way for the new citizenship law, they agreed that if there was to be a new harmony between the Chinese and Malays, something must be done to remedy the state of affairs in which the Chinese (with the Europeans) dominated the economic life to the exclusion of the Malays.<sup>1</sup> Another initiative by the government was to give its blessing to a new party called the Independence for Malaya Party which was led by one of the fresh new figures in Asian politics, Dato Onn Bin Jafaar, and which tried to base itself equally on all three communities. Its declared aim was independence for the country, within or outside the Commonwealth. The government did not object.

Other good things were done. Some of the grievances of the Chinese were set right. In 1952 they were admitted for the first time into the superior Civil Service of the federation (though in the proportion of only one Chinese to every four Malays).<sup>2</sup> A start was made with introducing the elective system into government by holding elections for local boards and municipalities. A start was made with raising a Malayan regiment which was to be the nucleus of a Malayan army, separate, like the former Indian army, from the British forces.

What is the solution for Great Britain? The only useful course, in spite of the forbidding difficulties, is to press on with the present policies, whose rightness at least in principle cannot easily be denied. Most of the Chinese are not at all fanatical, and are perfectly ready to make compromises, especially with a government which seems to have the situation well in hand. The quarrel with the government lies not with the policies but with the pace at which principles are translated into deed. In spite of General Templer's dynamism, Malaya has become a by-word for the bureaucratic civil servant who misses his opportunities, and, lacking political sense, never perceives the moment for action.

Real political progress depends on the elections for the federal assembly. Until they are held, the Federal Council is an unreality. Of its 76 members only 16 are Chinese, and only 6 represent Labour. Some of the more liberal leaders are naturally impatient, and suspect that the real policy of the administration is the old one of dividing the

<sup>1</sup> Many Malays press for socialism as the only means by which Malays could take over the business monopolized by the Chinese.

<sup>2</sup> The Chinese had a genuine grievance in their exclusion from the Malay Civil Service. But they dominated the subordinate services. It was because of this that the Malays had feared their entry into the superior service. Moreover, Chinese had fought shy of recruiting for the armed services, and it was held that this disqualified them from being treated on exactly the same footing as the Malays.

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communities and continuing to govern. In fairness let it be recognized that the leaders of the Chinese and Malayan parties are no less in favour of hurrying slowly than are the civil servants. They have grown to fear their own electorate, and suspect that it is looking for new leaders. In consequence they have come together in a curious coalition. They fear to be sacrificed at the polls, as the earlier generation of nationalist leaders in India was slaughtered by the radicals.

Could Britain withdraw from Malaya altogether at this stage as it withdrew from India? What was true in 1945 is still true to-day: no government other than a Communist one could yet be organized to maintain order in the country after the transfer, and at best it may be years before a genuinely national government can stand on its own legs. Would transfer to the Communists be disastrous? It would cause an enormous increase of Communist prestige throughout Asia, and deliver into the hands of China and Russia the great natural resources of South-east Asia. Britain must therefore continue, at least for a time, the burden, risks and expense of holding this last remnant of its Empire in Asia. It gains little, but wards off great dangers.<sup>1</sup>

As long as Britain is faced with rebellion in Malaya, as long as it is even partly responsible for carrying on the federal government, there is the possibility that it may be pushed or driven into repressive or authoritarian action which might be the negation of all which it had stood for in Asia. The war against the Communists has not been fought legalistically. At times the government has held large numbers of people without trial. The defence regulations have curtailed liberties drastically. To move the squatters the government had to take high-handed powers. Yet all government, in time of emergency and civil war, has to take steps of similar kind. The signs at present are that the spirit of liberal administration has not been impaired in Malaya. Given peace, nothing vital will have been lost.

One change which might have been expected has quite failed to happen. The Malays have not been attracted by ideas of union with the people of Indonesia; nor has the Indonesian Government as yet made a great propaganda appeal to them. The indifference of the Malays is curious. The majority of the present population of the peninsula came from Sumatra. The supreme problem of the Malay

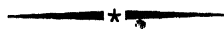
<sup>1</sup> Economically the amount in dividends from rubber and tin received in this country is much less than Britain's direct expenditure on dealing with the Malay rebellion. But the sale of rubber and tin produces dollars without which the British economy would be seriously threatened because without them the sterling area might hardly survive.



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people, as it seems to many of them, is to save themselves from being swamped and subordinated by the Chinese. In Malaya itself the two peoples exist in roughly equal proportion; but if Malaya joined Indonesia, the 2½ million Chinese in Malaya would be swamped by seventy or eighty million people of Malay race. The attraction to Malay nationalists may be so great, that at least the possibility must remain of a campaign in a few years' time for Greater Indonesia.

## CHAPTER SIX



# THE COLOMBO PLAN

[i]

Very soon after the former British territories in Asia became independent, it was evident that the new political structures would need economic underpinning.

At first it had been supposed in Asia that economic improvement would take place of its own accord as soon as the Western Empires were broken. During the struggle for independence, the nationalist parties had said dogmatically that the grinding poverty of the East was due chiefly to exploitation by the West. The people in the emancipated countries looked upon Independence Day as the beginning of a new age economically as well as politically.

In fact in most of the areas concerned, these hopes were dashed, for the new age has so far been harder in material life than the old. Partly this has been due to circumstances which may be only temporary. The economies of all the countries had been damaged by the war; the economic dislocation continued afterwards; inflation increased the disorder. All these adverse factors could be considered transient. But even if they should all be changed or disappear, the trend in South Asia will probably continue to be downward. Throughout the region, in almost every country (though in some much more pronouncedly than in others) the standard of living is steadily, if slowly, falling at a time when in the Western countries it has, in spite of the damage of the war, been increasing relatively fast. That is a fact as crucial for Asian history as the political emancipation which has taken place.

What has caused this alarming trend, which is a reversal of the events in Asia of half a century ago? One cause is that Western capital

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has ceased to flow in large quantities towards the area. In the nineteenth century it was Western capital which galvanized its countries, especially India, and caused their rapid economic advance. At that period British capital built railways, irrigation systems, ports, utilities and industries. Its flow was at its height in the last decades of the nineteenth century and it was already falling off before the first World War; the last substantial Government of India loan was raised in London in 1912. Recent investment until the end of the year has been comparatively small, and the South Asian economies lapsed into long-term depression. Local incomes were too small to allow of an adequate capital formation at home as a substitute for foreign lending.

The second cause has been the population increase. Its menace to India—which is affected the most acutely—has been already described. The crisis is dangerous also in Java, parts of Indo-China, and East Pakistan (and of course, outside the area, in Japan). The rise has been going on for a long time; only the great influenza epidemic at the end of the First World War caused a temporary slowing down, and that did not last long. If present trends continue, the population of South Asia will increase in the next twenty years from 570 million to 720 million. How are the extra mouths to be fed? They are like a vast new nation suddenly ushered in on the world. That is the essence of the problem for the new governments.

The long-term economic crisis was for a short time hidden by an economic boom which was due to a rise in prices of the raw materials from South Asia after the outbreak of the Korean war. For a short time some of the countries, especially Pakistan, appeared more prosperous than they had ever been before. But prices have once again fallen, and the disguises have been stripped away.

In consequence, all the new governments in South Asia have come to share one common characteristic. All, after taking the steps needed to maintain their sovereignty and internal security, have made it their first task to try to arrest the slide towards economic disaster and change the economic trend. Their task was peculiarly difficult. They were under political pressure to do things which would worsen the economic stresses, rather than lessen them. For example, the spirit of nationalism, which the new governments must serve or they will perish, resents—very naturally—the fact that many of the most prosperous economic enterprises are in foreign hands. It wants them expropriated. (Dr. Musaddiq in Persia may have been unusually radical, but his attitude is the instinctive one of much of Asia.) Nationalization

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would in fact drive away the capital which these countries so desperately need; yet nationalism in its more intense form does not even realize that this need for capital is real, and thinks that foreign investment may be a net which traps the innocent countries of Asia.

In another way also the pressure of opinion forces government towards steps which may retard, not encourage, economic progress. The intelligentsia—to which these governments must be very sensitive—favours large policies of socialization. One of the reasons for this is interesting. Industry and commerce in a country such as India is still to a great extent a concern of families, and young men born outside the families which own controlling interests see little chance as things stand of working their way into positions of control or wealth. Their best hope, if they wish to have a career in industry, is that the state should take over industry, and that they should therefore, through the Civil Service, be able to get their hands upon it. So they are all for extending the state's activities. Yet expert advice given to the governments might well be that private enterprise, not socialism, would at present bring the quickest economic progress.

It was on the whole a surprise that governments, placed in such difficulties, should have survived as well as they have done. Perhaps it was even stranger that they should have evolved an economic policy acceptable to them all and to the Western world which was anxious to be their backers. This policy was the Colombo Plan for the economic development of South Asia.

### [ ii ]

The Colombo Plan was first formally propounded at a conference of the foreign ministers of the British Commonwealth held in Ceylon in January 1950. That it came to birth in this way showed, more or less by chance, that the Commonwealth, in spite of all the loosening of bonds, was still a positive force in the affairs of Asia.

The birth of the plan at the conference was accidental. The conference had not been called to deal primarily with Asia, least of all with Asia in its economic aspects. That it was held on Asian soil was simply a gesture to mark the rising importance of the Asian members of the Commonwealth; and the purpose had been that the discussions should range over the problems of all the world.

It happened that the conference met at a moment when Asian

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questions were especially to the fore. The Chinese Communists had set up their new government at Peking: it was essential that the Commonwealth should take stock. The obvious weakness of the countries of South Asia was economic, and the suggestion was made that the Commonwealth as a whole might take an initiative in promoting a radical economic reform.

Who was the author of the Plan it would be hard to say. Mr. Senanayake, the conference chairman and Ceylonese prime minister, whose later tragic death was so much deplored, seems to have been the first to put an economic plan into the conference agenda. His idea was taken up with so much vigour by Mr. Spender, then Australian foreign minister, that for a time it was called the Spender Plan. But the foreign ministers were not themselves economists. They modestly referred the working out of the details of the Plan to the economic experts and economic ministers of the Commonwealth.

As a result of this recommendation there was created a new body—with a very elastic constitution—called the Commonwealth Consultative Committee. In the course of two years it met four times—in Sydney, London, Colombo and Karachi, and the intention is that it should meet in future about once every year. The committee consists of both ministers and experts. The civil servants representing India have made an especially impressive contribution.

The consultations started between the Commonwealth countries. But other countries in the South Asia region showed interest. Indonesia and Viet Nam decided to take part. They are now members of the Consultative Committee. Thailand and Burma are associates.

The result of the labours of the Consultative Committee was an outline of a six-year Plan published in November 1950. It was adopted by all the countries concerned. Execution of the plan began formally on 1st July 1951. And—with great auspiciousness—the United States of America gave the Plan its benediction, became a member of the Consultative Committee, and raised, not unnaturally, the hope that it would become its financial backer.

### [ iii ]

What did the Plan consist of?

It was not really correct to speak of a Plan in the singular. It was a summing-up and collation of the individual plans of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak. Each country decided its own programme entirely by its own efforts.

## THE COLOMBO PLAN

Nothing was imposed by the Consultative Committee. The committee does not even have a permanent secretariat.

The aim of the Plan was to transform the South Asian economy by co-ordinated action of several different kinds. Science was to be applied more effectively to agriculture, and waste eliminated; knowledge was to be spread more widely so that the populations would themselves adopt more modern methods. This quasi-missionary enterprise of governments was to be supplemented by a number of large-scale and very expensive construction projects, such as the building of new irrigation systems, electricity plant and industries. The Plan was to be co-operative in that each of the countries of the area would give assistance to the others in matters in which it was specialized.

All these various enterprises were to be made possible by the investment in the region of large supplies of new capital. Here was the essence of the Plan. It was a statement that governments intended to promote the renewal of the flow of capital which had begun in previous generations to resuscitate Asia, but which had died away. Some of the capital was to be found in the Asian countries themselves. But Britain and the Western dominions of the Commonwealth pledged their aid—and it was hoped that behind Britain might lie America. The Colombo Plan became thus a scheme for continuing into the new world of emancipated sovereign states something of the economic co-operation between Britain and Asia which had existed in the earlier time.

As a scheme for infusing capital, the Colombo Plan in Asia might at first sight seem like an Asian replica of the Marshall Plan in Europe. But in many respects it was different. The needs of post-war Europe were different from those of Asia. In Europe the gigantic machinery of its industry had ceased to turn; but the machinery itself, though damaged, was substantially intact. What Europe had needed was a stimulus to start its industrial heart beating again, and it was this which Marshall aid provided. Once recovery began it gathered speed. In Britain, it was possible to end the aid surprisingly quickly. But in South Asia hardly any industrial apparatus exists. The Colombo Plan will have to create it. This will take a long time; unlike Marshall Aid, the Colombo Plan must therefore be a long-term one. And while Marshall Aid began with the infusion of very large supplies of capital, which rapidly accomplished their purpose and could be diminished, in South Asia by contrast the earlier phases of the Plan will require a comparatively small amount of capital, for

## THE FUTURE

in present circumstances the absorptive capacity of South Asia is small. Only as the Plan develops will the demand become really large.<sup>1</sup>

It must not be supposed that the plan for renewed Western investment was something quite new in the Colombo Plan. In the five years between the end of the war and the birth of the Plan, a very large investment in South Asia had been once again made by Great Britain. The investment was in the form of restoration of the damage done by the war to the economies of the countries of the area. 'Unrequited exports' from Britain—gifts, investments, and exports against the sterling balances—accounted in the five post-war years for one fifth of all that Britain shipped abroad, and most of them went to Asia. They caused a heavy strain on the British economy; and the rapid rate of the release of the sterling balances was probably the chief factor in causing the devaluation of the pound. But the effort produced substantial results. The railway systems in South Asia, which had become dangerously run down during the war, were re-equipped; the worn-out factories were re-fitted; new ports came to life. One official estimate of this British contribution in the five years after the war is as high as £750 million. This was quoted several times by the late Mr. Bevin. Though this estimate may have included disputable items, it omitted other items. At least it suggests the size of the British effort to save South and South-east Asia from economic collapse.

In a sense it would be true to say that a Colombo Plan has been in operation ever since the end of the war. But what had been done was haphazard. The Plan, when it was formally worked out later, was an attempt to extend and systematize these efforts. And one great hope, still only partly fulfilled, has been to attract American capital as well as British capital in support of the project.

### [ iv ]

A great many things could be said about the details of the Plan. The great bulk of it was the Indian part; three quarters of the contemplated investment was there. This was natural, given the size of

<sup>1</sup> The sponsors of the Colombo Plan could point to the history of the countries concerned for support of their argument about what investment could do. For example in India in the nineteenth century it was British capital which started the economic transformation (which in turn made possible the population increase). Britain invested in railways, irrigation, ports, utilities and industries, and the consequence was an extraordinary development of waste land, as in the Punjab.

## THE COLOMBO PLAN

India's population and its proportion to the total population of the region. The Indian plan covers the period from 1951 to 1956, and contemplates a special expenditure by government of about £1,550 million, together with an estimated private investment of nearly £300 million.

The Plan was published in an impressive document which reviewed the whole economic problem of the country. It emphasized the need for a proper balance between the demands of agriculture and the demands of industry. Since India's basic malady—the cause of famine and of its trading difficulties—is the deplorably low agricultural productivity, the first priority had to be given to increasing the output of food. Effort was to take two forms. On the one hand there was to be a multitude of projects, none of which need cost a great deal of money, for putting Indian agriculture on an up-to-date basis, for seeing that the farmer was informed about modern methods, could obtain improved seeds, modern fertilizer and pest controls, and for ensuring that the agricultural output was not wasted by being devoured by rats and pests while in storage. On the other hand there were a number of grandiose schemes, very expensive to carry out, for harnessing rivers and thereby through irrigation bringing great new areas under cultivation while at the same time generating electricity on a grand scale. These great construction schemes in the river valleys have begun to catch the popular imagination in India much as the Tennessee Valley scheme caught the imagination of America twenty years ago.<sup>1</sup>

That has been the main effort of the Plan. Yet no Indian national government could concentrate on agriculture to the exclusion of all else. In India—in all the economically backward parts of the world—there is the deep, resolved desire for industrialization—all the stronger because of the suspicion in the national mind that the advanced parts of the world are in a conspiracy to keep the rest of mankind as hewers of wood and drawers of water. Industry has come to mean national strength. It means modernization. It means the escape from poverty. It offers a way, and perhaps the only way, of drawing off some of the excess millions from the land.

The plan therefore makes a start with industrialization. It should in fact create about 400,000 new places in industry each year. Many

<sup>1</sup> Yet how many of the vast population of India have any idea of the exertions of the Indian Government on their behalf? There is a story of Mr. Nehru visiting the site of one of the river schemes. He asked a number of labourers what they thought was the purpose of their work. None could give an answer. For them it was enough that the Government wanted a hole dug.



## THE FUTURE

of the critics of the Plan say that is quite inadequate, and that the yearly increase should be at least double. But the present Plan is to be followed in 1956 by a subsequent one; and the Government has let it be known that in that the place given to investment in industry will be much larger.

Though the Plan came into operation as early as 1951 and is now in mid-career, it is still a problem how its later phases will be financed. There is a gap of about £300 million between the estimated cost and what India and its Western associates have calculated that they can provide. India has improved its chances of attracting private capital from abroad by the very statesmanlike reassurances which its government has given against nationalization and expropriation, and by its promises that there will not be discrimination against the foreigner. (How differently things have turned out from what was expected in 1947.)<sup>1</sup> Possibly the capital will be found. The great hope is that America will in the end supply the deficit, though so far it has moved slowly.

That, in very bare outline, is the Indian part of the Colombo Plan. All the other countries taking part have also much to show and can report progress. Ceylon, like India, is carrying out major multi-purpose projects for irrigation and generating electricity; and it is engaged on five ambitious plans for opening up the sparsely inhabited dry zone in the eastern and central parts of the island. Pakistan is concerned mainly with schemes for new industry.

Progress in all the countries has so far been surprisingly close to schedule. There were fears that all programmes would be delayed because of the rearmament in the West which would divert for military purposes the iron and steel which would otherwise have been used for making equipment for the Plan. But—partly owing to the earnestness of the Western countries that the Plan should succeed—these fears were found to be exaggerated.

What can the Plan achieve, if carried out in all the countries in its totality? It should, in the entire region, increase the output of agriculture by 10 per cent. The output of electricity would be increased by 67 per cent. Thirteen million new acres would be brought under cultivation. The irrigated area would be increased by 17 per cent. This is impressive. But is it enough? It must be remembered that during the six years of the Plan's operation, the population, in India alone, will increase by 30 million. The extra production may prove

<sup>1</sup> India has, of course, not given up its natural desire to see foreign firms employing Indians to the maximum extent possible.

## THE COLOMBO PLAN

just enough to provide for the extra mouths. It will not raise the standard of living. It is a Plan for preventing things from becoming worse, not for making them better.

[ v ]

Bitter attack is made on the Plan by Communism. The Moscow and Peking radio denounce it as a scheme by the West to continue to hold the Eastern countries in economic servitude even after the abolition of political control. How this will happen is not clear. The Communists hint that there must be secret conditions for the grant of Western aid. They say that industry which might compete with the West would be kept down, or that the Asian countries would be obliged to be at the disposal of the West in case of war. At economic conferences of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, Russian delegates have hinted that much more practicable aid could be had from Russia than from the West; but they have never given details.

Though by what they say about the Plan, the Communists seem to regard it as directed against themselves, it has in fact very little to do with Communism. It is wrong to think that it was planned as an answer to Communism. Something like it would have been needed even if there had been no Communism at all. The Plan expressed the creative vigour and sense of responsibility of the new governments. It responded to the demand of their peoples. It was forced on the governments by their grave long-term prospects. So far from the Plan being an anti-Communist conspiracy inspired by America, the great difficulty has been to secure America's effective interest.

Nevertheless in one respect the Plan is a kind of competition with Communism, though not consciously entered on by the countries of the region. The Colombo Plan is based on the principle that economic advance is possible under a system of liberal government and by use of capital borrowed at home and abroad. Its sponsors believe that new capital is still the best instrument by which to effect rapid economic change without inflicting great hardship upon the peoples whose lives are to be transformed. The Communist countries are also set on economic advance; China announced its Five Year Plan immediately after the Indians. But the methods which the Communists will follow are quite different from those of the Colombo countries. They have totalitarian government. The capital for the plan—all economic construction, whether under Communism or free enter-

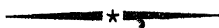
## THE FUTURE

prise, requires capital—is to be raised by forced savings, which means a considerable present fall in the standard of living in the interest of future prosperity.

Which of these systems—the Colombo Plan with its liberal system or the Communist Plan based ultimately on force and the concentration camp—will prove the more effective? South Asia is not irrevocably attached to free methods. If Communism, as shown in the Chinese Plan, should really produce results more striking than those in India, many people in Asia would reconsider their political ideas and loyalties. So the performances of the two Plans will be anxiously scrutinized and compared.

One other consideration, and an ironic one, is in the minds of those who helped to draw up the Colombo Plan. They know that, even if the Plan is successful beyond expectation, they cannot assume that it has saved South Asia from the threat of revolution. It is in countries where improvement is taking place and where there is a certain optimism that the true revolutionary situation develops, not in those which are stagnant and in despair. This is borne out by study of many of the great convulsions of history. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia might never have taken place but for the remarkable industrialization and general economic advance in Tsarist Russia in the twenty years before the first World War. Some of the wisest observers are therefore asking whether the Colombo Plan is to be one of the precipitating factors of revolution in Asia.

## CHAPTER SEVEN



# THE WORLD OUTSIDE

**T**he emancipated countries of the former British Empire in Asia had to make their experiments, political and social, in an environment, or a climate, or a context, very different from what had been expected when the nationalist parties were struggling for freedom. By the unforeseen transformation of the world outside, many of the calculations and beliefs held most firmly a decade or two ago in South Asia—by the British as well as Asians—have been totally upset. It is apparent now that the domestic circumstances and potentialities of the countries of South Asia are only some of the factors which will decide the fate of their political experiments. What is happening outside will be as decisive—perhaps more decisive.

Consider the contrast in the international relations of the countries in South Asia at the time when British power was at its height—and what it has been at any time since 1939. There is a celebrated passage of De Quincey on the Roman Empire which might have been written as truly of the British Asiatic Empire for almost all the century before the recent war.

‘There was silence in the world: no muttering was heard: no eye winked beneath the wing. Winds of hostility might still rave at intervals: but it was on the outside of the mighty Empire; it was at a dream-like distance; and, like the storms that beat against some monumental castle, they rather irritated and vivified the sense of security than at all disturbed its luxurious lull.’

In this still sanctuary, the educated classes of India and South Asia were free to cultivate the arts of peace, to demilitarize their minds, and to become incurious of what was happening beyond the borders. Except at rare moments they ignored the outer Asiatic world; their vision stopped short at the Himalayas and the Indian

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Ocean. Nor was this blindness limited to the people of the region. To many of those in England who were concerned with Indian or Burmese or Ceylonese affairs, and to many British officers serving in the area, the region of the Indian Ocean seemed an interior without an exterior, whose affairs could be regulated with little reference to the outside world.

How great is the change which has happened since. When the British power was withdrawn from South Asia (except from Malaya), the unity of the region, at least its effective military and political unity, came to an end. It could no longer be taken for granted that all the countries would act together in case of war. Even though the succession states might in an emergency hope for military aid from Britain, if they desired it, or from the United Nations, the exact value of this aid was problematical. In the atmosphere of the late forties and early fifties, many of these countries believed—and feared—that there was more chance of their being dragged into war by the United Nations, than of their needing the aid of the United Nations. For this reason they were unwilling that their own foreign policies should correspond too closely with those of Britain or of Western countries.

These were changes internal to the region. They were matched by external ones. The whole of Asia had altered. To the north the Russian power had grown immeasurably stronger. China, for a century too weak to matter, had become a formidable neighbour. But Japan, which had formerly been the single authentic great power of Asia, had ceased, at least for the time being, to matter as anything but a satellite of the United States of America. And America, whose impact had formerly been hardly felt in Asia, was bidding for the political and military alliance of the new states, and its acts and wishes became for the first time of major concern to Delhi, Rangoon and Karachi.

Nor was it only unfamiliar military and political pressure which South Asia had now to suffer. It was assailed by all the creeds of our time, projected at it by every means of propaganda. No longer did liberal ideas have the field more or less to themselves. The immense prestige of Communism reared up against them. No longer was it taken for granted that the rule of law, whether or not realized in the concrete, was in the abstract the most desirable political ideal. The various ideas of the British Oriental civilization which the new states had inherited from the past and to which they were more or less dedicated now came under question and challenge. South Asia had become one of the areas most exciting and attractive to those

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who were waging the cold war between Communism and its opponents; and because of the cold war, class was set against class in the newly emancipated countries, and their governments were weakened.

This general study of the metamorphosis of the former British Asia must therefore end with a brief account of what lies to-day beyond the region's borders.

## CHAPTER EIGHT



# RUSSIA

[ i ]

Throughout its history Russia has appeared to be in two minds whether its destiny was to be the greatest power in Europe or the greatest in Asia. This is apparent not only in the self-conscious writings of its statesmen and philosophers but is written in the history of its foreign policy. Its interest in Asia in the last century and a half has alternated with its interest in Europe; when it was succeeding in Europe it was least active in Asia; it became active in the East when it met a check in the West. This can be traced easily. Russia moved forward against the Khanates in Central Asia after it had been halted in the West by the Crimean War; again after the crisis of the Berlin Congress it turned its attention towards Manchuria until it was stopped there by defeat in the Russo-Japanese war.

Since the end of the last war these alternations, in the past spread over decades, have been compressed into a few years. Russia's first hopes were of overrunning Western Europe while the post-war revolutionary tide was flowing. But by 1948 it had been blocked. A wise Indian observer has said that one of the main causes of its failure there was that Russia refused to come to terms with Western political tradition; it was not content with marrying its *élan* to the more sophisticated political methods of the West. Resistance to it therefore hardened. This may be so. But the most obvious cause of Russia's defeat was the Marshall Plan which restored the economies of Western Europe.

The Marshall Plan, by damming the Russian advance westwards, affected Asia nearly as much as Europe; it saved Europe, but diverted

## RUSSIA

Russia's expansive ambitions towards Asia. In the immediate post-war years it had at first pursued a very modest policy in Asia (though by the Yalta agreement in the last months of the war it had been careful to regain—with American consent—the rights in Manchuria which it had possessed before the Russo-Japanese war). During the same time it was so half-hearted in its support of the Communists in China against Chiang Kai-shek that the only explanation seemed to be that it did not take their chances very seriously, or else that it mistrusted them. But when it moved from the offensive in Europe to the defensive, all was changed. It sought compensation in Asia. Just about the same time the Chinese Communists came to power in Peking.

The prospects which then opened to the two Communist allies in Asia were glittering. Together they occupied the centre of the Eurasian continent. Each protected the rear of the other. They held the inner lines. Stretching all round their borders were a multitude of states, most with newly established governments, most with revolutionary fires burning in them, many of them quarrelling with one another. In each of these countries on their border was a fanatical Communist party, waiting for direction from the Kremlin. Moscow and Peking could choose at what particular point to strike at what particular movement, and they could hope to make a steady advance by political and economic means and without military action. By backing the revolutionary parties in neighbouring states and by flooding them with propaganda they could hope to overthrow some, and by economic blackmail to reduce others to subservience.

The conditions for revolution in most parts of the Orient are almost as favourable as could be imagined. The withdrawal of Britain from India had as a consequence removed the umbrella of British protection from the Middle East—much to the satisfaction of the region—and in spite of the attempt by America to restore stability by using political and economic influence, all is now in flux. It is true that Turkey and Israel are strong. But they stand like the only solid bodies in a collapsing world. Egypt's effort to save itself has borne little fruit. Meanwhile Russia waits. It shows no sign of spoiling its chances by forcing the pace. It lets the revolutionary forces work for it. Its policy in Asia has almost everywhere been as restrained and competent as in Europe it has been maladroit.

In the Middle East, these troubles are only at their beginning, and the threat to South Asia is still veiled. But in east and south-east Asia the troubles are in mid-career, and the world watches. For all of the



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commotions—the wars and disturbances in Korea, Indo-China, Malay, Indonesia, Hyderabad and the Philippines—Moscow, rightly or wrongly, is held responsible. Perhaps too much has been attributed to it; many risings and revolutionary acts by Communist parties may have been decided on locally, and without orders from Moscow; in some cases, China, not Moscow, may have plotted the outbreaks. But Moscow could not disinterest itself in the rebellions even if it wished to do so. Communism will now flicker and now flare up throughout all the Asian lands, and Moscow, for ever realist and opportunist, cannot fail to do its best to cause a general combustion.

Paradoxically, even religion may propel Russia forward in its imperial advance, at least in Moslem countries. If the Communists could bring themselves to say less about atheism—as they did in the war years—it would not be difficult for them to represent Communism as Islam brought up-to-date, so strong is the egalitarian tradition in Mohammedan society.

### [ ii ]

Russian propaganda is undoubtedly having success. It starts with many advantages. Russia, even when the worst is known of its assault on human liberty, has not squandered all its reserves of credit. In the years between the wars it was the one power which seemed to offer effective and continuous help to oppressed peoples, and to be whole-heartedly on their side. It can evoke memories—the renunciation by the Bolsheviks of their privileges in China,<sup>1</sup> the setting up of the University of the Toilers of the East at Tashkent, its whole-hearted denunciation of Western imperialism. Asia is flooded with books, pamphlets and journals produced expensively and sold cheaply. If they are dull, they suggest an earnestness of purpose. They are full of information which suggests that Russia has the secret of how to increase production and check the exploitation of the weak by the strong, the two things for which Asia yearns.

The measure of Russia's success is that some of the basic Russian concepts are gradually becoming accepted as axioms by the Asian intelligentsia. Especially Moscow has succeeded in imposing its own picture of its great rival America. How many Asians now accept it as almost self-evident fact that American civilization is vulgar and callous and threatens the national heritage of the Asian countries; that to receive economic aid from America is to become America's politi-

<sup>1</sup> On which they subsequently went back.

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cal vassal; that America, if it appears strong without, is weak within; that America wishes to keep Asia as an agricultural area producing raw materials for Western industry; that, operating through quisling ministers in Asia, it prevents Russia assisting in the economic development of Asia; that America's interests would be served by war, and that America plans a war in the future; that, whoever wins presidential elections, America is ruled by 'Wall Street', and that the machine of democracy is a cheat. These are the negative axioms. On the positive side Russia has succeeded in suggesting a picture of itself as a country in which deserts are being irrigated, the illiterate taught to read, women are being taken out of purdah, and the simple and primary needs of the ordinary man given first priority, as most rational men agree that they should be.

Russian propaganda also uses skilfully the legend that Russia is a genuinely federal state in which minority nations enjoy full autonomy. This is especially important because it implies that Russia has 'solved' one of the most troublesome problems facing nearly all Asian countries—that of minorities. If this was made out, it would incline many people towards Communism in their desperation at finding any other way of overcoming the difficulties of the minorities. In fact the Russian claim is false. There is no genuine federalism in the U.S.S.R. The central government controls absolutely the constituent governments; and both the central government and the constituent governments are controlled absolutely by the Communist party, which is a highly centralized organization dominated by Great Russians.<sup>1</sup>

Another of the Communist propaganda devices is to represent that Russia, which had repudiated the West European traditions and which includes under its sovereignty a large Asian population, is

<sup>1</sup> See *Russia and her Colonies*, by Walter Kolarz, London, 1952. 'The sovereignty of the individual Republics is a constitutional fiction because in reality they have no say in questions of internal security, high-level economic planning, transport, or higher education, not to speak of foreign policy and defence. . . . Even from a merely legal point of view the constituent republics do not own the natural rules of their soil. They belong to the U.S.S.R. as a whole. The same applies to the agricultural land of the republics. The sovereignty of the constituent republics is also rendered fictitious by the existence of the Prokuratura, the strongly centralized office of the all-Union Attorney General, which was founded in 1933. . . . The personnel of the Prokuratura in the provinces and districts is under the command of the all-Union Attorney General. The Attorney General acts as public prosecutor and checks on the legality of the measures carried out by the republican and local authorities. . . . The Soviet Central Government has shown a singular indifference to its own creations in the field of nationalities policy. National areas and national districts have often passed suddenly out of existence.'

## THE FUTURE

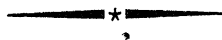
really an Asian power and the champion of Asia against the West. But here at last the propaganda begins to overreach itself, for nearly all Asians are certain that Russia is a European country. The check which Russia may meet at this point in arguing its case need not however affect adversely the cause of Communism as such. Since the revolution in China, a Communist ruler who was indisputably Asian had come upon the scene, Mao Tse-tung. His rise, and the triumph of Communism in China, may prove for Asia of more account than the triumphs of Lenin and Bolshevism.

[ iii ]

In March 1953 Stalin died, and within a few days there began the series of gestures and hints at conciliation by the Kremlin which were to cause throughout much of the world a mixture of hope and perplexity. Was this the start of a strategic retreat by Russia and was its expansionist pressure to be relaxed? Some people, remembering the flexibility of Russian policy, and how Russia traditionally had backed away when it met formidable opposition, and explored instead for weak places, thought it quite possible that in Europe it was ready to slacken its energies, the opposition there having grown too strong, but that in compensation it would redouble them in Asia; and they recalled Lenin's maxim that the eventual downfall of the West might be brought about on the banks of the Yangtze and Ganges. If Russia allowed tension to fall in Europe, and transferred its activities to Asia, that would be in line with the traditional policy not only of Russia but also of the Communist party, which has been a continual zigzag. Those who thought on these lines expected a redoubled effort by Russia in Asia, directed chiefly perhaps at Japan and at India, and likely to be the more dangerous because after an international *détente* the vigilance of its intended victims might have been lessened, and suspicions lulled.

These were expectations of the future; and it is still not certain that the Russian peace offensive will continue or will achieve even the initial pacification which might open the way for these new tactics.

## CHAPTER NINE



# CHINA

[i]

When the Western empires in South Asia were being wound up, the great country in the north, China, was in confusion and weakness, and had been so for nearly a century. It had become taken for granted that this would be its more or less permanent condition. The Kuomintang Government, though nominally one of the victors in the war, was impotent and was regarded with pitying indulgence. Though it had been treated in the war as a major ally by the great powers, this was out of flattery and out of the desire to persuade it to continue steadfast in the war against Japan. It was also because of President Roosevelt's intuition of China's coming greatness, which led him perhaps to see in the rags and tatters of Kuomintang China a glimpse of strength to come. In spite of this war-time treatment there was no expectation that China in the years immediately afterwards would exercise much influence beyond its frontiers. It might advertise indiscreetly its ambitions to recover territories which had once been Chinese and were now under different control, but this caused annoyance, not fear. Its claim and its propaganda were not taken much more seriously than the fantasies of a sick man seeking in ambitious dreams for compensation for his sickness.

Yet almost immediately after the war, new events happened in China with startling speed, and changed the prospects of all the rest of Asia in 1949. The Communists replaced the Kuomintang. Mao Tse-tung, the leader of the new state, gave notice of what the change meant. China, he said, had 'stood up'. For a century it had been insulted by the West, and could do nothing. Now it was reborn. It

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was in irreconcilable hostility to the imperialist West, and would therefore preserve the closest friendship with Russia.<sup>1</sup>

### [ ii ]

The Chinese Communist Government began its life more or less moderately. During the first months after they seized power, the Communists astonished China and the world by their honesty, their relative efficiency, and their avoidance of bloodshed. Gradually, however, it became clear that the Chinese revolution might have international consequences as wide as those of the first French Revolution or the Russian Revolution.

Indeed the Chinese Revolution has run a course strikingly like that of the first revolution in France. In France there was first the concentration on domestic reforms; similarly in the first months at Peking. The French revolutionaries enjoyed at first a great deal of sympathy abroad, not only from those really like-minded but from all friends of progress; so did the Chinese Communists. (It was widely taken for granted that they were not Communist in the Russian sense at all, but were a reformist party anxious to carry out the change in land-tenure which everybody agreed was China's crying need). In France the attack by the Emperor and the King of Prussia released outwards the passions which the revolution had generated internally; in the Far East, the war in Korea may have started the Chinese on their adventures outside China. In France, the Coblenz manifesto led to the massacre of prisoners and the Terror; in China it led to the terrible trials and public executions, in which two million people perished according to Peking's own statements. War led in France to the levee *en masse* and the hurling of defiance at kings: in China to the defiance of the whole of the Western world and the 'Aid Korea Resist America' movement. The parallels were in small things as well as large. In France there was the 'Carmagnole', in China the 'Yangko' dance.

The bursting by the Chinese troops across the Korean frontier in November 1950 may prove to have been one of the decisive events of

<sup>1</sup> The Kuomintang was really a victim of the war with Japan. It wore itself out in leading the national resistance. Its spirit broke. The almost incredible corruption and squalor of its regime when it returned from Chungking after the Japanese surrender was not what might have been expected of the party as it existed before it had been subjected to too much strain. Between 1933 and the outbreak of the war with Japan in 1937 it had conducted a vigorous and promising administration. Many who condemn it to-day praised it then.

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modern times. Whether in the spring of that year the Chinese had been consulted about the plan of the North Koreans to attack the South is still not known: but in the first months of the Korean war Peking had kept carefully uncommitted. When at last, after General MacArthur's thrust north of the Thirty-eighth Parallel, the Chinese revolutionary army came into action, it meant that a new factor had been added to Asian and world affairs. It was ragged and ill-equipped: it was fairly easily checked when the United Nations had recovered their balance after the attack. But some observers felt themselves uncomfortably reminded of the first armies of the French Revolution and what they had brought about. They remembered a celebrated passage of Carlyle.

'Gallic impetuosity mounted ever higher. The spirit of Jacobinism wedded itself to national vanity. It was one nation against the whole world, but the nation had that within her which the whole world would not conquer. The soldiers of the republic became sons of fire. Bare-footed, bare-backed: but with bread and iron you can get to China.'

But in this case they came *from* China, and the question was how far away from it their revolutionary armies would eventually operate.

The menacing fact behind them was that China had inexhaustible manpower as an asset to set against the superior technical strength of its opponents. With mobilization once started, army could be raised after army and thrown outwards; the destruction of each would be but an incident; as long as the revolutionary spirit and ardour lasted, other armies could be raised to replace them.

### [ iii ]

The dramatic arrival on the scene of the Chinese armies led to other disturbing questions. It was recalled that China in the fairly recent past had been accustomed to receive tribute from a number of countries on its borders, including Korea, Tibet, Assam, Burma and Nepal. This had been interrupted in the nineteenth century when the Western imperial powers in Asia had required China to accept responsibility for the acts of its 'vassals', which it generally declined to do, or to disinterest itself in their fate. One by one they had passed out of the Chinese sphere. But would not a revived China try to restore its suzerainty?

It was clear that there were other factors also which might propel the new Chinese government into expansionism. Looking out beyond

## THE FUTURE

its borders, it could see large masses of Chinese who in the previous hundred years had migrated to the countries now attracting its interest. In Malaya there are more than two million Chinese: in Indonesia 1,200,000, in Burma nearly 200,000, in the Philippines 125,000. Might these not aid and attract a Chinese advance, as the pockets of Germans in East Europe attracted the march of Hitler?

It was useless to try to find comfort in the belief that China was not a warlike country. This myth grew up during China's period of exceptional decadence at the end of the last century. Most of Chinese history has really been one of expansion. In its long history, China has built and lost empires at a great distance from its homelands. Chinese generals in the Han dynasty two thousand years ago camped on the shores of the Caspian Sea, and fifteen centuries later a Chinese admiral sailed into the ports of South India with a fleet of three hundred ships. If in the past hundred years China has been out of action as an expansionist power it is because of the double circumstance that it has been passing through an acute agrarian crisis—such as on previous occasions has caused bloody upheaval and the overthrow of dynasties—and that its society was also disordered by the impact of the West. But now, China is recovering its strength, which will be still further enlarged if it succeeds in developing a modern industry, which is the aim of its economic plan. If previous history is a guide it will renew its pressure outwards.

Already in its first three years it has moved into the correct positions for manoeuvre. Nobody yet knows the reasons for the attack on Korea—but Korea is, indisputably, the great strategic centre from which either China is menaced from outside or else China menaces Japan. A move which took place at about the same time was the occupation of Tibet, which for decades in the days of the British Raj had been carefully maintained as a buffer state by Britain to keep Chinese armies far away from the Indian border. By this act, China put itself in a position to infiltrate through the Himalayan border land into the Indian plains. It was strange that India watched this extensive and threatening move almost without protest or alarm as if hypnotized. It abandoned to China its privileged position at Lhasa: indeed it never tried to defend it. Seeing in the Chinese revolution only one phase in the reversal of the power relations between Asia and the West, persuaded that as an Asian country it must cheer on the revival of an Asian brother, it saw with complacency Peking install itself in a good position from which to menace India, if ever it

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chose to do so. India may pay dearly for its belief—without any support in history—that all Asian powers (except Pakistan) have the friendliest intentions towards one another.<sup>1</sup>

### [ iv ]

The new China is not only a revived military power threatening its neighbours. It is also a centre of revolution, fascinating them. Here, again, lies a parallel with France. In one light, the France of Carnot and Napoleon was the military power of Bourbon France, revived and made more efficient; Europe feared it. But in another light, France was the emancipator; and Europe beckoned to it. To-day in the same way Asia fears Peking as the renewer of China's imperial tradition, but many of its fanatics and some of its idealists are attracted to Mao Tse-tung as a new apostle. Thus at the same moment Peking may appear both as the New Potsdam and the New Jerusalem.

How bright the star of Mao Tse-tung shines in the Asian sky is not even now recognized in the West. Many Asians who dislike Communism in the abstract are ready to kow-tow to him; and Peking has an attraction for Asian nationalists—or continentalists—never exercised by Moscow. The Chinese Revolution has been the most intransigent of the Asian replies to pressure from the West. The other Asian countries which revolted against the West, and have freed themselves—India, Burma, Indonesia—had not broken with the West entirely. In consequence the extreme nationalists in these countries—the fanatics and the unforgiving—feel drawn to the Chinese Revolution as providing the model for the root and branch emancipation which they have not themselves achieved.

Their feeling is reinforced by theory. The Chinese Revolution can be represented as the restoration of an old political pattern of Asia. Throughout most of recorded history, political power in Asia has belonged to land empires: wealth and power have come from organizing large peasant populations. During the ascendancy of Europeans in Asia, this traditional organization was set aside; the centres of wealth were the ports; political power was based on navies and maritime commerce. The old land routes between the centres of civilization in Asia were interrupted. It was the age of sea-power. Some

<sup>1</sup> How far has China been the author of its own policies, and how far has it been guided by Russia? Nobody in the West seems to know. Before the Chinese met with difficulties in Korea, Peking was under no obligations to Russia. But while the Korean question lasts, it must obviously defer to Russia.



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Asian nationalists argue that this was an unnatural organization, and that the continent suffered by having imposed upon it the alien ideas and values of the maritime interlopers. They say that with the Chinese Revolution the land power has reasserted itself, and Asia is once again free to determine its future by its own genius.<sup>1</sup> If the new China offers a civilization which is radically different from that based on the liberal ideas imparted by the West, this may, by such reasoning, be regarded as recommending China still more.

Another reason for the prestige of Mao is that he has invented an Asian form of Marxism. This gratifies the Asian nationalists, who in the past had regarded Communism as defective because of its Western origin. Mao could claim honestly that he had given a new twist to Communist theory and had not simply imitated Russian ideas. For example he had risen to power in a very unorthodox way. Instead of making a Communist revolution in the cities by means of a Communist party recruited from industrial workers—as had happened in Russia—Mao built up his strength by exploiting agrarian grievances and by raising peasant armies: with these, the Communists moved ultimately from the countryside and overwhelmed the towns. Communist intellectuals in Asia say that Mao has 'enriched' Marxism, and, even though the Peking leaders themselves are diffident about making such claims, hint that Communism in Asia will take different forms from Communism in Europe.

The rise of Communism in China has had one strange and subtly unfair effect on the mind of many people in Asia. The party in China overthrown by Mao Tse-tung was the Kuomintang which claimed to be the custodian of China's national interests. By analogy, Communists everywhere have begun to compare the nationalist parties in India, Pakistan and Indonesia with the Kuomintang, and to suggest they will share the fate of the Kuomintang. This is very unjust, for these parties are not at all comparable with the corrupt and inefficient Kuomintang, except in the one particular of claiming to have a special mission on behalf of the nation. But the doubt is sown and grows. Governments in Asia are especially vulnerable to doubts spread about their future.

[ v ]

What effect will the new influences radiating from China have on Gandhism, the most notable cult in the last generation in India? Ten

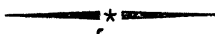
<sup>1</sup> The Communists say that America's treaty with Japan is a last attempt by sea-power to check the revival of the continental land power.

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years ago, Gandhi was the supreme figure, not only in India but in all South Asia. However much the younger men might pretend to be impatient with him, most of them submitted to his moral authority. Some part of his influence was lost soon after his death; the cult of poverty and the spinning-wheel, the condemnation of the factories and great towns, the suspicion of science—these were bound to be questioned when his personal magnetism ceased. But it was accepted that others of his ideals could supply a perfectly rational and noble philosophy for twentieth-century statesmen. There is the insistence on individual moral responsibility in all political action. There is non-violence. There is the reverence for truth. There is the doctrine—which made him the great anti-Machiavel—that means matter more than ends.

Rising up against Gandhi to-day, as a kind of tremendous counter-symbol, is the figure of Mao Tse-tung. Mao may be a great man of his sort, but the ideals for which he stands are in many ways the opposite of those of Gandhi, and far commoner in history. Maoism is the counter-offensive of political worldliness after the eccentric successes of the Mahatma.

## CHAPTER TEN



# AMERICA

[ i ]

**B**efore 1941, America had affected South Asia very little, except in the Philippines. Its centre of interest in Asia had been China; and at the end of the war the part which America was in future to play in Asia seemed quite uncertain. Would its enormously increased strength, together with the shrinking of distances caused by constant new inventions in transport, drive it to intervene in the remotest corners of the world, or would it revert, perhaps after a fairly long interval, to the isolationism which had been its tradition?

People who had visited America during the war years had been impressed by the outburst of new interest in the world overseas. There was an extraordinary concern with map-drawing and with the so-called science of geo-politics. The mass of Americans was discovering the outside world, and it was an event as exciting to them as were the discoveries of Columbus to the men of the Renaissance. Asia, especially, fascinated them, for while the complexities of Europe baffled them and left them hopeless, in the Asian countries they—rather strangely—saw a new romance and a new stirring of democratic ideas. All this suggested that the horizon of America was to be extended permanently. But there were still very powerful influences to restrain American action. The national tradition was to look at the outside world as if it were a theatre, an exciting spectacle to be applauded or hissed, but with whose actions Americans, as audience, did not interfere.

The Eastern countries wondered with a shiver of apprehension what would happen to them if American power was used—and also what would happen if it was not used.

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America began its post-war adventures in Asia with fairly clear tradition of Asian policy. For some years before 1945 most Americans who took an interest in Oriental affairs had had a number of guiding principles. Empires, they thought, were morally wrong: the American tradition opposed imperialism. Most Americans had therefore welcomed the rise of the liberators, Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru and the rest. American opinion had been used sporadically to support them and shake down the old order (though the American Government always avoided becoming involved in the quarrel between the liberating parties and the imperial governments). Americans thought that the chief theme of modern Oriental history was the formation of new eastern nations, and were not much impressed by the fact that the Western empires imposed peace. Those whose interest was commerce were ready to take peace for granted and to suppose that if the Western governments were replaced by national ones, American business would receive a better deal than from the imperial governments.

Most American had applied these principles quite honestly and sincerely in determining their own country's relations with its one Asian dependency, the Philippines. They had turned against any idea of keeping it as a permanent colony, and had approved the efforts to prepare it for self-government.

As fateful as what America, in 1945, thought about Asia was the geographical distribution of its interest. For most Americans, Asia meant primarily one country—China. Its business men traded there, the largest number of its missionaries taught there. America had watched with enthusiasm the beginnings of the Chinese renaissance, the rise of Sun Yat-sen, the victories of the Kuomintang. Many Americans, like many Englishmen, have an emotional need to adopt a foreign country as a kind of pet, and for a great part of this century China was certainly America's favourite country. This sentimental regard reached its height during the war when President Roosevelt tried—not simply for tactical reasons—to gain China's recognition as the fourth of the world's great powers.

Guided by these conceptions, Americans in the years immediately after 1945 watched the changes then happening in Asia and were inclined to think them almost wholly good. At this stage they seem to have taken it more or less for granted that the new post-war China (still not Communist) and the succession states of the old empires, would live together happily with one another. This showed a certain blindness. All the lessons of history are that when empires are dismantled there is bound to be havoc before a new stability is won.

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‘Upon the breaking and shivering of a great state and Empire’, said Bacon, ‘you may be sure to have wars; when they fail, all goes to ruin and they become a prey.’ The danger was that with the withdrawal of the Western power there should be a political vacuum in South Asia. As in nature it is a vacuum which is the cause of hurricanes, so might this vacuum also breed storms.

Slowly this became clear in America. It was agreed that it was not enough for the United States to applaud the victory of nationalism in Asia. Every great country must conceive it to be its duty to use its influence to establish stability everywhere, or at least in the main centres of population and civilization. America was thus impelled to throw its weight, or a small part of its weight, into building the new society of Asia.

A part of the instability in Asia was the result of the withdrawal of the British power. Many voices called upon America to become the heir of Britain in tranquillizing Asia—and to find for the purpose new policies harmonious with the times.

### [ ii ]

So far as America had a clear plan, it was to act in close concert with China. An American in 1945, pressed on the intentions of his country in Asia, might have replied that it was to form a Washington-Nanking axis. Round this axis the other Oriental states might revolve like satellites. Britain was looked at suspiciously as planning a rival axis, London-Delhi.

Alas for these hopes. In 1946 and 1947 America concentrated on trying to bring a healing internal peace in China, and thus to prepare the way for the Sino-American co-operation which was intended to be so beneficial to all Asia. The story of its failure—especially of the failure of the mediation between the Kuomintang and the Communists—is told in the report by the State Department on its China policy published in 1950. The recrimination over the failure has poisoned American politics ever since. Could American statesmen, if more guileful, or more prescient, or more willing to use dollars or force, have kept out the Communists in China? A looker-on is unwilling to guess at an answer, but, studying the complicated and alarming history, he may feel surprise at the spectacle of an enormous revolution taking place in China and the lack of understanding of what was happening shown by the great number of American statesmen who expressed themselves upon Asia.

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America had now to take stock of a new situation. It had turned towards Asia benevolently, anxious to use its abundant power and wealth for helping its protégés to run their concerns, all collaborating in increasing prosperity and establishing peace. Suddenly all was changed, and America, instead of being the altruist, not vitally engaged, found itself the target of a fierce attack. Out of the depths of the Chinese mainland came the tempest of Chinese Communism, which threatened to sweep Americans and America out of Asia altogether, to deny them its trade, and to turn over its vast natural resources and manpower to the military use of Russia which, from the other side of the world, was already challenging America to a life and death struggle. The transformation was remarkable. America, instead of graciously offering its aid to client Asian peoples, had to set itself to fight a stubborn battle if it was not to find the Eastern world closed.

Its first need was an ally in the place of the China which had turned renegade. Some enthusiasts convinced themselves that the refugee Chiang Kai-Shek in Formosa was still the true China *in posse*, and that if he was supported he could recover China and revive the Sino-American alliance. But they were a minority, however loud their propaganda. Inevitably one possible ally seemed to have superior claims to all others. Japan, safely under American occupation, a penitent country proclaiming fervently that it was taking America as its new model, a country strongly anti-communist, an efficient country whose speed in recovery compelled admiration even from those who had detested its war-time performances—this country was readily taken by America as solace for its rebuff in China. General MacArthur, the American pro-consul in Tokio, was the middleman in making the match.

American policy in Japan developed rapidly. Japan's economic recovery was hastened, partly by the measures suggested by Mr. Dodge, the American financial adviser. One by one the restrictions on Japanese freedom were lifted, and the occupying force liquidated itself. The generous San Francisco Peace Treaty was negotiated, restoring Japan's full sovereignty, including the right to re-arm. The Japanese Government, elected according to the democratic constitution imposed on Japan under the occupation, responded to the American advances. In return for emancipation, it agreed, by a treaty supplementary to the multilateral San Francisco peace pact, to the stationing of American armies in Japan, on the basis of an alliance and for an indefinite period.

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Thus the stage was set. Midway in the wooing of Japan—before the alliance was made but when the alliance was foreseen—the Korean War broke out.

[ iii ]

The United Nations war in Korea speeded up the evolution of American policy. Very soon after the war began, America's operations on behalf of the United Nations, and its containment of Communism in general, became hopelessly entangled. The safeguarding of Chiang Kai-Shek and Formosa by the American Navy, ordered by President Truman on the third day of the war, was not an act decided or authorized by the Security Council; yet the President was able to say that it was imperative in order to safeguard the flank of the American troops doing the bidding of the Security Council in Korea. In fact Formosa proved to be one section of a defence wall which the Americans set themselves to build around China. That was the new American strategy.

In the next two years this wall was completed and strongly fortified. It ran roughly from the Aleutian Islands—an American possession—through Japan and Formosa to the Philippines, which was bound to America by a very close military alliance. In the south it was tentatively pushed forward to include Indo-China; after a slow start, American supplies began to reach the French in large quantities, and greatly strengthened the French opposition to Viet Minh. Indonesia was invited to join in, but declined. A new Chinese wall was being built, but designed this time to keep the Chinese on the outer side. (A part of the Republican party still hoped that Chiang Kai-Shek might be helped to recross the wall, and put an end to Communism in China and thus to the need for the wall.) Some people supposed that the logical end of the policy would be the creation of a Far East Nato. Was this in the mind of Mr. Acheson when America created the Anzus Council—the joint council with Australia and New Zealand which was to implement America's guarantee to these two countries given at the time of the San Francisco Treaty? Britain was mysteriously excluded from the Council though it pressed for participation, and though twenty years ago the formation of such a body without Britain would have been unthinkable.

It is surprising that America, which in Europe had used the economic means of the Marshall Plan so successfully in checking the

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spread of Communism, put its reliance in the Far East so much more in military than in economic action. While it spent vast sums in military aid to Formosa, South Korea, Japan and the Philippines, it allotted minute amounts for the economic development of South Asia, even though it paid lip service to the importance of this as building a barrier against radicalism, and though it expressed its interest in the Colombo Plan.

The very success of the Americans in completing and strengthening their fortifications in East Asia, brought another factor into existence, or at least very much magnified it. This was the suspicion of America in non-Communist Asia. The irony was that, in the proportion that America by its action increased the feeling of security in Asia, the free countries of the region felt it safer to express their dislike of some aspects of American policy. Many of the criticisms were not very serious and were what was to be expected from weaker peoples against stronger, poorer against richer, those under obligation against those who conferred the obligation. There was also an understandable and almost aesthetic distaste for some parts of American civilization as it appeared to the peoples of Asia when they set themselves to examine it, often with eyes prepared in advance to be unfriendly.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the feeling was better based. It rose out of an analysis, at least partly correct, of America's general policy. This policy, said the Asians, took its rise from America's interpretation of the struggle in the Far East as a conflict between evil and good, bond and free, the children of darkness and the children of light. Because it saw the situation in this way, America could not compromise, and in all it did in the Far East thought in terms of a crusade. Asia—even non-Communist Asia—was not willing to accept fully its analysis of the crisis and identify its interests completely with those of America. Indeed its own analysis was that the crisis rose ultimately out of the power struggle between America and Russia, which was a quarrel between Western powers in which the East did not wish to become involved. Every Asian student, or at least every Indian student, has read Macaulay and remembers the passage in which he describes how brown man fought brown man on the Coromandel coast because the

<sup>1</sup> From their talk and their magazines it seems that the vision of some American business men is of American goods, technicians, ideas, swamping the world; of Teheran, as an American journalist has said, being made to look like Texas; of cities in India equipped with a Main Street, soda fountains and drug stores; of American Cinemas, refrigerators and automobiles as the goal of the endeavour of all the ages.



## THE FUTURE

King of Prussia had a quarrel with the King of France. Asians are anxious not to fight one another again because of a Western quarrel; they fear that America thinks of them not as ends in themselves but as a means to an American end.

Communist propaganda was devoted on a grand scale to intensifying all these suspicions. Daily it repeated that the ultimate aim of America in Asia was to bring under American control the wealth of the Orient. It said too that America, in its search for allies in Asia, would always back reactionary government against the people and the progressive forces of the time. Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-Shek were the stock examples.

The propaganda was only partly effective. But the suspicion against America and the West is so deep that propaganda was hardly necessary. It is found not only in India, which is sometimes regarded as irreclaimably 'neutralist', but in countries such as Pakistan which are actually willing to enter into alliance with America. A good expression of it is to be found in a ceremonial lecture by the Finance Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammed Ali, who, before he became a minister, was once described by a good judge of administration as the ablest civil servant in Asia. 'To the countries of Asia', he said, 'the East-West struggle is primarily a struggle between two groups of Western nations in terms of two varieties of Western ideology. . . . This struggle has taken on the colour of an ideological conflict but is at bottom a struggle between two groups of powers for the domination of the world. . . . Neither group is inspired by universal values or by the interests of mankind as a whole. To the peoples of the East both appear as oppressors, and it is only their mutual rivalry that keeps them in check to some extent.'

It is sad and ironical that this comment could be sincerely made in 1952, when only seven years before, at the end of the war, it had quite certainly been the aim and ambition of most Americans to be simply the good neighbour and to live and let live alongside a world of free nations. In the eyes of most of the Orient at that time, America still meant the land of Washington and Jefferson, whose fixed tradition was anti-imperialism. Nor in the long run may this view seem to have been short-sighted. To one proposition America has always been especially dedicated—the right of nations to determine their own destinies. Yet America, in trying to play its part in organizing a world in which the free nations might live without war, has incurred in Asia, partly out of an effort to grapple with an unexpected challenge, the suspicion that it wishes to limit and meddle with national freedom.

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[ v ]

A part of the suspicion of America comes from dislike of its choice of Japan as its principal Asian ally. The attitude of the rest of Asia towards Japan has always been ambivalent. On the one hand it salutes with pride the country which most successfully adapted Western science and challenged the West at its own military game, beating Russia in 1905 and destroying the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour in 1941. In this light Japan appears as the champion of Asia. But in another light it is seen as the conqueror and flail of south-east Asia in the last war. A revival of its military power is expected and very much feared.

Very few people in Asia believe that Japan has had a change of heart since defeat. They regarded its docile attitude towards America during the occupation as an amusing spectacle of how to hoodwink a victor. One of the most sapient English books on post-war Asia, *Kakemono*, by Miss Honor Tracy, takes the same view. If Japan was sincere in its enthusiasm for democracy, it was because it supposed that democracy was an additional part of the secret of America's strength, supplementing the industry and science which Japan had already copied. There would be little surprise at any course which Japan chose in future to follow in its revived pursuit of greatness.

Many people in Asia think that a future phase in Japan may—to America's consternation—be one of national-communism. Though the Japanese Communist party is small, and has recently been unsuccessful at elections, it is well organized. The social structure of Japan is exactly that which Communist revolutionaries find most promising: there is a large, well-organized and docile industrial proletariat, a weak middle class, students who are very radically inclined, a tradition of autocracy, army officers who might be induced to back Communism if it promises national revival.

Japan will be driven by terrible economic pressure. By defeat it lost many of the sources of its raw materials and part of its markets. Its population, already excessive, grows at the rate of a million a year; and if demographers expect an eventual slackening, this will not happen in the near future. Economic stress and strain helped to propel Japan towards Pearl Harbour. It would not take much economic hardship to cause another political explosion.<sup>1</sup> ;

<sup>1</sup>The Japanese are trying with great energy to overcome their economic difficulties. Every airplane which leaves Japan is full of business men trying to find markets. There is hope that Japan may win a place in providing the capital goods for the development of South Asia (to be made possible by American investment). But this remains no more than hope.

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Japan's future is anybody's guess. Only of one thing are most people in Asia certain: Japan's singular and often calamitous history is not yet over, and its spirit—energetic, macabre, artistic, humourless, unintellectual—has not changed. This spirit has lived through all the changes in Japanese history, and is most intelligibly portrayed in a remarkable travel book of the last century, *Tales of Old Japan*, by Lord Redesdale. Even to-day, Japanese children are taught such songs as the following:

*Now when the moon is bright I see  
The stories conjured up for me  
Of suicides—by moonlight told—  
To me, a boy, of heroes bold  
Who killed themselves most pleasantly.*

Whether or not they are likeable, Japanese are formidable. They act, even if foolishly, with more unity than other people. The discipline of the country in its recent defeat and adversity have caused, if not admiration, at least wonder.

Of course it is not inevitable that Japan's military ambitions should revive. Other countries have had a brief military glory and then retired to peaceful life: Sweden in the seventeenth century is an example. Like all relatively small island countries, Japan finds its strategic position worsened by the conditions of atomic war, and this may deter it from rashness. To-day a large part of the Japanese people are sincerely pacifist and reprobate militarism. But it was the same in Germany after its defeat in the first World War. At that time the liberal and socialist forces seemed to prevail in Germany, and the Weimar republic seen from outside looked like a liberal democratic state; but latently Germany remained a militarist empire, and with Hitler's rise to power it showed again its real face to the world.

It is no wonder if the peoples of Asia have a certain alarm about what America may so industriously have nursed back to life.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN



# BRITAIN IN ASIA

[ i ]

Since the end of the British Empire in Asia, British policy in Asia has for the most part followed from a recognition of certain outstanding facts.

The main one of these is that Oriental nationalism is the strongest force in Asia to-day, and will probably grow stronger. Britain may overrate the extent to which Asians are moved by considerations of nationalism as opposed to those of economic interest; but it is true that every Asian government, living in fear of the opposition in its country capturing and turning against it the passions of nationalism, must show itself extremely suspicious and intransigent in all its dealings with Western countries. Asians remember that the West, using the advantages of better arms and better political organization, was in the past two or three hundred years dominant in much of the continent. To-day Asia is on its feet again; it will stand no slights, for which it has a searching eye, and it would like still to pay off old scores.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the new national states in South Asia feel that the threat to their new independence comes, not from invasion from outside, but from their being used as pawns in the power struggle between the West and the Communist countries. That is the second main fact about the present temper of Asia which Britain has recognized plainly. It causes the 'neutralism' of the Asian countries, lies behind all India's foreign policy, and behind the occasional quarrels between America and countries such as Indonesia. It is hard for the

<sup>1</sup> It would like to continue crusading against the West on behalf of Africa, for example in Kenya.

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Asian countries, with memories still vivid of the imperial governments of the West, to see the international struggle in unclouded terms as one between freedom and incontestable wrong.

The third fact which Britain has accepted as crucial is the rise of Communism. Communism and nationalism are separate forces but they are connected. They may fight one another—as the Communists in China fought the Kuomintang—or they may coalesce—as the Communists have for the most part captured nationalism in China after the rout of the Kuomintang. National Communism in any large country must be a peculiar danger to its neighbours, for the joining together of two such dynamic forces may cause terrible explosions. A nightmare possibility is that Communism may eventually fuse with the volcanic force of nationalism in Japan.

Communist propaganda paints nationalism as it exists under a 'bourgeois' system as being sterile, exploitative, violent and unstable. The classic example which it cites is the Kuomintang Government in China. Does history require that all the bourgeois nationalist systems in Asia should eventually pass over into being systems of national Communism? That is what the Communists believe and what their opponents deny. In a sense the chief theme in Asian history to-day is the struggle of the liberal nationalist governments of South Asia (especially of India) to show that nationalism does not necessarily evolve into Communism. The Indian Government is not the Kuomintang, nor does the fate of the Kuomintang show what is necessarily to happen to it.

### [ ii ]

These are the facts on which British policy in Asia since 1947 has been based. This policy has on the whole been uniform for both conservatives and socialists; a majority of conservatives accepted the emancipation of India. The new principles have been applied much more alertly in South Asia than in the Middle East: British policy in the Indian Ocean area has been strikingly more successful than in Iran or in Egypt.

The post-war attitude of the British public towards Asia has passed through two stages. In the first, which lasted two or three years, the disposition of the public in general was to turn away from Asian affairs. After an adventure of 200 years in the East it had had enough. For decades its conscience had been troubled by the British position in Asia, and it had come to look on British aims and actions there as

## BRITAIN IN ASIA

the interest of a small class, not of the nation as a whole. Socialist idealism, post-war exhaustion, the concentration of the British public on domestic issues, and offended self-regard because of the stream of abuse which the Indian Congress for tactical reasons had showered on Britain, combined to make it seem likely that the divorce of Britain and the East would be complete and unregretted.

Events, however, proved stronger than these passing moods; and Britain was gradually forced to resume its interest in Asian affairs. This does not mean that it had been insincere in its transfer of power. It has had no hankering after the authority which it had laid down. But events drove Britain to a continuing involvement in the affairs of Asia. One reason was that old ties are not loosed as easily as could be supposed. For example in India the British found, as the Indians did also, that they had become more closely bound to one another by sentiment during their partnership of two centuries than either had imagined. There was sheer good will apart from economic and political interests. Another reason was that the supreme British concerns are peace and prosperity and neither could be assured if so large a part of the world as South Asia was suffering from chronic instability. Burke once said that the interest of commercial men in any part of the world was prosperity in all the other parts; similarly the interest of a power which desires stability, like Britain, is stability everywhere else.

There were also the economic links. The political severance had left these intact. Freedom in India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon had come by mutual consent, not revolution and proscription. British business was committed, purely for business reasons, to continue to function in Asia. An additional tie yoking Britain and the former British territories in Asia was that during the war they had accumulated vast sterling balances in London, amounting in 1946 to not much under £2,000 million. They had every reason to trade with Britain rather than with its competitors with whom they had no such credits.

Finally the exclusion of Malaya from the lands given up by Britain kept Britain actively engaged in the politics of south-east Asia (as also, in a lesser way, did the continued retention of Hong Kong). For the security of Malaya Britain was interested in what happened in Indo-China, Thailand, Indonesia. It maintained in Malaya not only a High Commissioner who was responsible for internal affairs—and in recent years especially for fighting the Communist rebellion—but also a Commissioner-General dealing with all Britain's exter-

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nal relations in south-east Asia. Perhaps at no previous time has Britain been so well-informed about the affairs of this region.

### [ix]

What, in concrete terms, were the acts of British policy?

In South Asia it abjured, meticulously and even ostentatiously, anything which looked like imperialism. It kept far away from the internal politics of the new countries. Without compromising with principle, it avoided every dangerous clash with Oriental nationalism. It knew its potential fury.

That was the negative side. The positive side was economic policy. Britain gave very large and continuous economic support to help shore up the independent countries of South Asia in their zealous struggles to organize their new life. This aid was finally systematized in the Colombo Plan, but it had begun a long while before the plan was thought of. As already stated, an official estimate of this aid between the end of the war and 1950 was £750 million. It was probably this heavy burden which broke the pound sterling and caused devaluation.

In international policies Britain still thinks and acts as an Asian power, even though it recognizes that its military strength has (relatively) become so much less. India's decision in 1949 to remain within the Commonwealth may—if it is sustained—prove to have been one of the fateful events in British history; for Britain, as a result, has to continue to consult with Asian statesmen before reaching its own decisions. The governments of India and Pakistan, if they choose to employ the machinery of the Commonwealth, are able to speak with more authority—with more vehemence—than they could do acting on their own.

It may be that up to the present one of the main consequences of the continuing union of Britain and Asia has been to increase the divergence on Asian policy between Britain and the United States. In any event Britain would probably not have seen eye to eye with America about China in the early days of the Communist regime, or about the economic needs of South Asia, to which America turned such a strangely blind eye. But Britain, with India at its elbow, has undoubtedly been more sensitive than America to the Oriental response to Western policies. It understands better than America the springs of Western unpopularity. It understands—and respects—the very strong yearning of the Oriental countries for neutrality.

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How wide and how serious is likely to be the divergence between London and Washington? It is extraordinarily hard to say, and it will vary according to whether conservatives or socialists rule in England, and according to the administration in America, Russia and China. Britain accepts frankly that the balance of strength has changed, and that America has now the primacy. American policy at the moment is bent on containing Communism in Asia, and perhaps on liberating some of the territory lost to it. Its chosen instrument for the purpose is Japan, whose military strength it is recreating. Its ultimate aim may be a kind of Far East Nato which will be a new Limes behind which Communists may safely rage. At worst there will be war, at best a stalemate.

The aim of the Asian members of the Commonwealth is different. Rightly or wrongly, they think that China will not for ever be a satellite of Russia. They regard it as one Asian power among others. Their view about the future of Asia is curiously like that of the more responsible European statesmen of the eighteenth century planning the combinations of the powers by which a certain stability may be assured. They do not welcome the intrusion into Asia of a Western crusade or of a rearming and strengthening of Japan. They believe that Asia is in a much more fluid and malleable situation than America supposes.

Which is the realist view, that of Washington or that of Delhi? Which appeals most to Britain? Time is necessary to give the answer.



## CONCLUSION

Asia', said one of the characters in a story by Rudyard Kipling, 'is not going to be civilized after the methods of the West. There is too much Asia and she is too old.' This book has tried to give an account of how in spite of Kipling the ancient civilization of South Asia was transformed by its contact with the West, chiefly through the British Empire. A new civilization was created, and it was a civilization at least partly after the manner of the West, though it preserved many of the old institutions and ideas, some of them of very great value. The Asian mind was large enough to contain both old and new. But it was an unstable civilization. When the British Empire was wound up, and the Asian countries became again self-determining, the civilization was bound to start a new period of rapid change. For the Westerner it was interesting to see how much of what had been derived from the West would be retained.

By chance it has happened that the beginning of this new age in Asia coincided with the struggle in the rest of the world between Communist and non-Communist systems. To the Oriental, Russia no less than America is a western power; but China is obviously Asian, and Communism increased its appeal immensely when it became the state system in China. In the countries of South Asia which are watching the struggle, the decisive class is at present the intelligentsia. They dominate the political parties. Agrarian discontent and labour unrest are important politically only so far as they are exploited by the intelligentsia. At least in India, most of the intelligentsia are at present well disposed to continue the liberal system of government. But their dominant concern is to modernize their countries and relieve the awful poverty. If China can show greater success in this than India and Pakistan, they may be ready to

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take China as the pattern for Asia. Both China and Russia attract because their starting point at the time of their revolution was very much like that of the Oriental countries to-day. Asia can regard them as kin in a way it can never regard America.

The crucial countries are India and Pakistan. If the West desires to contain Communism in Asia, the best thing it can do is to give all possible aid in enabling their present systems to be strong and successful.

The other problem raised in South Asia at the dissolution of the British Empire was how to organize international security. A vacuum was left by the British departure. Upon the Indian Government fell the chief responsibility for evolving a policy to fill the void. It experimented, felt its way, oscillated, and exposed itself to charges of inconsistency. But now the policy has become clear, and the Indian Government pursues it with resolution. The policy is to hold apart from the power struggle between Communism and the West, while being willing to collaborate with the West in every way in economic and social matters. To make its policy more effective, India has taken the leading part in a block of Asian and Arab countries in the United Nations. This has sought to prevent the third world war—which would engulf all these countries—by mediating wherever possible between China and the West. It has also opposed the American quest for bases.

In the British times, all the countries under the British flag in Asia had naturally acted more or less as a unit in international matters. But under the new system the succession states could each go its own way. The wonder was that in the first years after independence they kept so much in step. Even the dispute over Kashmir between Pakistan and India had limited consequences. But recently a very severe test has been imposed on them. America, by offering Pakistan substantial military aid, which might bring it near-military equality with India, has opened up the possibility of a major divergence between Pakistan and India; since Pakistan, in taking the aid, will almost certainly be drawn into the American orbit. It is impossible to foresee exactly all the consequences if India and Pakistan finally part company, but they are bound to be grave. The agreements between America and Pakistan, and between Pakistan and Turkey, are the most important events, internationally, in South Asia since the withdrawal by the British.

Up to the present the history of South Asia after independence has been surprisingly quiet. Even if trouble is to come, whether by

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domestic upheaval or international combat, there is no need to despair. In every phase of history there is compensation for the miseries of human life. The excitement of a high cause, the exhilaration of combat, the value of energy, change and new creation may more than offset the suffering and insecurity which will beset South Asia. Different tempers will judge the scene differently. On the one side are those who, seeing the world cumbered with too much bloodshed, value now security above all, and regard the will for change, even when this seems to be overdue, with a certain circumspection. On the other side are those who value an age by what it engenders in new ideas and institutions, and what it calls out in energy and achievement; in this light they regard the sufferings of wars and revolutions, deplorable though they may be, as unfortunate concomitants of, not as deterrents from, high endeavour.

At least it can be said that one age has endured long enough; it is time that the East created something of its own instead of borrowing; and, as the Chinese say to comfort themselves in trouble, the new times, if turbulent, will make good reading in the history books for posterity.

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